University of Alberta

Narrativizations and Perversions: Storytelling Structures in the Plays of Sally Clark

by

Robin Charles Whittaker

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts.

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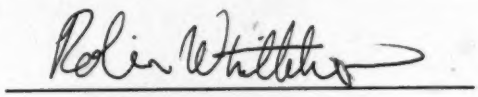

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Narrativizations and Perversions: Storytelling Structures in the Plays of Sally Clark* submitted by Robin Charles Whittaker in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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To the memory of my mother Marlene,
for her determination amid adversity.

ABSTRACT

The plays of the contemporary English-Canadian playwright Sally Clark have received limited critical attention, though Clark has been among Canada's most recognized dramatists during the past two decades. This thesis considers Clark's plays as revisioning storytelling structures both intratextually and intertextually. Her hybrid genres—historiographic metadrama, environmental theatre and the dramaturgy of the perverse—have led to mixed reception of her plays, including the co-written *Sleeproom*, a "separation impulse" form of environmental theatre. Dramatic conflict in Clark's "Ten Ways to Abuse and Old Woman," *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* and *Wasps* is created intratextually through postmodern narrativization techniques; intertextually, Clark reworks the Artemisia Gentileschi story to comment on fact-fiction narrativization in *Life Without Instruction*. Two of Clark's "Judith plays," *The Trial of Judith K.* and *The Widow Judith*, pervert space and time dramaturgical structures to reconsider state ideology and the narrative of *The Book of Judith*, respectively.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past twenty years the works of Vancouver-Toronto playwright Sally Clark (1953-) have, paradoxically, proven to be among Canada's most recognized yet critically neglected dramatic *oeuvres*. Her professional work has earned her significant recognition: *Moo* garnered a Chalmers Award (1990) and a Dora Mavor Moore Award nomination (1990), *The Trial of Judith K.* was short-listed for a Governor General's Award (1991), her short film *Ten Ways to Abuse An Old Woman* was awarded the Henri Langlois International Film Festival Special Prix du Jury (France, 1992) and her second short film, *The Art of Conversation*, garnered a Bronze Award at Worldfest in Charleston, South Carolina. Clark has been playwright in residence at five major Canadian theatres: Toronto's Buddies in Bad Times Theatre (1983-84), Theatre Passe Muraille (1985-86), Nightwood Theatre (1987), Niagara-on-the-Lake's Shaw Festival (1988) and Nakai Theatre in Whitehorse (2001-present). *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Theatre* lists Sally Clark in its "Feminist Theatre" entry under playwrights of the seventies and eighties who explored "in a more directly feminist way [than previous female Canadian playwrights] such issues as family politics, stereotypes, madness, violence, sexuality, and reproductive rights" (Benson and Conolly 204). And in 1994 Cynthia Zimmerman lists Clark among Wendy Lill, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Joan MacLeod and Banuta Rubess as a new female playwright in the early eighties who was "gaining currency" (21).

Despite this recognition, however, there is in all a deficiency of critical study on Clark's work. The *OCCT* provides neither a discussion of Clark's life nor of her plays, whereas Joanna McClelland Glass, Sharon Pollock, Judith

Thompson and other contemporaries of Clark are afforded their own entries.[1] What is odd is that by this time no less than five of Clark's plays had premièred at six major Canadian theatres in three provinces.[2] To date, Clark has premièred ten plays across Canada, including *Sleeproom* (1993), co-written with Robin Fulford, Daniel MacIvor and John Mighton.

It seems as if there has been a push in the English-Canadian theatre milieu to encourage the production of Clark's plays, while at the same time a reluctance among critics and historians to place her among Canada's most influential contemporary playwrights. Writing in 1989, Jerry Wasserman placed Clark alongside Wendy Lill, Joan MacLeod and Kelly Rebar as "talented playwrights who I believe will dominate Canadian drama for the next decade" ("Letters ... 1989" 58). But by 1997, Paul Malone was forced to conclude that Clark's "success on the stage has been enough to warrant more attention than she has, as yet, received" (335).

Critical commentary on Clark's plays has been limited. There exist a few studies concerning Clark's adaptation techniques, though Clark herself has rejected the term "adaptation" for at least one of her plays (Malone 286). Barbara Godard's "(Re)Appropriation as Translation" (1990) discusses what she believes to be Clark's strategies of adapting masculine narratives in novels into feminine discourse in drama by rewriting *The Trial of Judith K.* and *Jehanne of the*

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[1] In fact, the *OCCT* entry on "Drama in English 4" lists Pollock and Thompson "among the six major dramatists" of the 1980s, along with David French, George F. Walker, John Murrell and Michel Tremblay. Clark is also absent from *English-Canadian Theatre*'s brief discussion of female playwrights, compiled two years earlier by *OCCT* editors Eugene Benson and L. W. Conolly; again Pollock, Thompson and a host of other female playwrights appear.

[2] These works are: "Ten Ways to Abuse An Old Woman" (1983, stage version, Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto), *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* (1984, Theatre Passe Muraille, Toronto), *The Trial* (1985, Tamahnous Theatre, Vancouver), *Moo* (1988, ATP/Belfry Theatre, Calgary/Victoria), and *Jehanne of the Witches* (1989, Tarragon Theatre, Toronto).

Witches with female protagonists.[3] By far the most sustained critique of Clark's work to date, Paul Malone's dissertation "Starring Joseph K." (UBC, 1997) dedicates a chapter to Clark's adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* into *The Trial of Judith K.*, focusing on gender revisioning. Laura Benedetti's "Reconstructing Artemisia" (1999) suggests that Clark's *Life Without Instruction* may be grouped among other adaptations of the Artemisia Gentileschi story as doing a disservice to Artemisia's life by replacing fiction with fact. And Ric Knowles' *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning* (1999) revisits Godard's discussion of *Jehanne*, arguing that it reconsiders the "truth" of pre-Christian witchcraft "while simultaneously asserting the constructed nature of any claim to truth" (156). These studies suggest that Clark's *oeuvre* holds a larger importance to dramatic criticism, but none venture far enough in either formalist or cultural analysis.

This study explores the ways in which Sally Clark's plays *inter*textually revise received narrative—historical and fictional—and the ways in which the characters in these plays *intra*textually revise their own narratives. Clark's primary strategy of revision, which I term "narrativization," draws from our compulsion to tell histories to explain our lives, (hi)stories that can never claim to be "fact." By way of narrativization, Clark's dramaturgy perverts Aristotelian cause-and-effect dramatic structures not simply by subverting dominant

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[3] Godard's study bases its main argument on significant errors, however. First, Godard appears to have misread *Jehanne of the Witches* as Jehanne's story; more accurately, Gilles de Rais is the protagonist-subject and Jehanne is his object.

Second, Godard attempts to link *Jehanne* to Michel Tournier's novel *Gilles & Jeanne*, the former as a dramatic adaptation of the latter. However, Ric Knowles points out that "Clark subsequently denied that her play is an adaptation of the Tournier novel and in fact denied having read the novel before writing the play (letter, in *Theatre* fn. 249, see also Malone 328). Instead, Clark told Judith Rudakoff in an interview that *Jehanne*'s first director, Clark Rogers, had told Clark "I want a play about female power and witchcraft" and that an occult bookseller had shown her a copy of Margaret Alice Murray's *The God of the Witches* (Clark in Rudakoff and Much 82, 83). While Tournier's novel may function as an example of Jehanne's story being told within a masculine narrative tradition (Godard does not adequately trace this), it certainly cannot be considered as an original source for *Jehanne*.

discourses packaged in familiar presentations, but by disrupting the very narrative, spatial and temporal presentation of dominant discourses at the level of dramatic conflict. Her plays self-critically admit they are themselves fictive discourses among many by (re)presenting the constructed nature of identity, problematizing the implied authority of reversal and recognition plot moments and disrupting narrative completion vis-à-vis her trademark open-endings. In these ways, Clark's plays question the very grounds on which we construct our own histories by exaggerating and exploiting theatrically our very compulsions to tell them.

Chapter One argues that the genres of Clark's plays are best categorized as forms of "historiographic metadrama," "environmental theatre" and "dramaturgy of the perverse." Chapter Two argues that postmodern "narrativization" techniques are the source of dramatic conflict in a number of Clark's plays and explores these techniques in her one-act play "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman" and her full-length plays *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* and *Wasps*; it then goes on to refute Benedetti's dismissal of *Life Without Instruction* by arguing that Clark's revisioning of "fabula" in *Life* constitutes a self-critical and postmodern questioning of the practice of historical narrativizations. Chapter Three explores how space and time are ideologically encoded in the first and last plays of Clark's informal "Judith Trilogy"—*The Trial of Judith K.* and *The Widow Judith*.

Each chapter functions as a separate critique, but together they suggest that the plays of Clark's *oeuvre* share all of the facets explored in this study, composing a remarkably uniform body of work. The overall assumption, following the historiographic bias for which it argues, is that this study's "take" on Clark's work is one of many that are possible and that while particularly

valuable and, hopefully, unique approaches to the work of one playwright is offered, they are by no means the only approaches, nor is Clark's work the only *oeuvre* to which they may apply.

Many of the plays considered in detail are among Clark's lesser-known works. By bringing the above theoretical perspectives to bear on these plays within the milieu delineated, I hope to illuminate their significance to her *oeuvre* and to Canadian drama at large. Conversely, I have chosen to spend less time on better-known plays (such as *Moo* and *Jehanne of the Witches*) not because they do not fit into these various discussions (they are, in fact, mentioned in turn) but because I feel that in foregrounding Clark's narrative "perversions" in her lesser-known plays, the reader will be able to readily transfer the analyses performed herein to her more familiar works.

Selected material from an illuminating personal interview I had with Sally Clark in July of 2002 is included throughout. These selections serve two purposes: either to provide reinforcement to the arguments made, or to acknowledge contrasts between the insights of this study and Clark's authorial intentions. Overall, the intention is that the theoretical discourse will situate Clark's words within the praxis of her social milieu.

Finally, a brief note on my interest in Sally Clark's plays. My practical experience with Clark's plays has provided me with an energetic compulsion for discussion. This was a discussion that began for me while directing *The Trial of Judith K.* in the winter of 1999 for Wilfrid Laurier University's Studio Theatre in Waterloo, Ontario; was renewed in the fall of 2000 when I taught *Wasps* as part of an introductory drama class at the University of Alberta; and was renewed again in the spring of 2001 when I directed *Saint Frances of Hollywood* at Edmonton's Walterdale Playhouse, where I have had the pleasure of acting as

Artistic Director for the past two years. Added to these fantastic experiences was my meeting with Sally Clark on Bowen Island, British Columbia. Sally's generosity that day and *via* email correspondence at other times has meant a great deal to my research and my appreciation for her work. I found on each of these occasions, as I find now, that Clark's work has universal appeal expressed in simplicity.

But most of all, her plays are fun! Overtly theatrical, they play with gender representation, metatheatrical devices, wild special effects, character doubling, genre codes and language games. The horrific is the ludicrous is the riotously unclassifiable. I find this to be at the heart of our worldview wherein we pay to be pleasured by realistically violent entertainment or flippant media snapshots of death a world away. These phenomena—sometimes labeled *catharsis*, other times labeled *tragicomedy* and still elsewhere labeled *satire*—have been at the heart of dramatic criticism from Aristotle to the present. I hope this study will justly reflect my intense preoccupation with Clark's work and our—Clark's and mine—mutual preoccupation with humour amid tragic circumstance.

CHAPTER ONE

PERVERSIONS OF NEO-ARISTOTELIANISM: THE GENRES OF CLARK'S PLAYS

Sally Clark's plays are remarkable for their consistency of subject, theme, imagery and form. All but three of her plays take as their subject middle class woman.[4] This heroine is placed in exceedingly hostile situations and among other characters whose relentless antagonisms often lead to the heroine's death—a death which appears to be of her own consent.[5] To a greater or lesser extent, all of Clark's plays deal with reoccurring themes: sanity *versus* insanity; the insensitivity and even hostility of the family, the workplace and the legal, medical and psychiatric institutions as; the state of being lost in physical space as a metaphor for being lost psychologically; and the state of being emotionally and intellectually disconnected from others. Paintings, photographs and postcards become graphic reminders of oppression, while knives and guns are recurring images of power. Stories told to explain events tend to further complicate the heroine's plight. There are also similarities in form. Clark's full-length plays are all two acts with many short scenes, and are populated with large casts of characters.[6]

While there are a many consistencies throughout Clark's *oeuvre*, there is a recorded history of confusion concerning the classifications of her plays.

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[4] *Jehanne of the Witches* is more correctly the story of Gilles de Rais and his objectification of Jehanne, while *Sleeproom* places the audience in the heroine's position. *Saint Frances of Hollywood* follows the life of the Frances Farmer who was born in middle-class Seattle but gained prominence as a Hollywood celebrity.

[5] There are a few exceptions. In *Wasps*, Val's life is "renewed"; in *The Widow Judith*, Judith goes on to live to the age of 105; and in *Life Without Instruction*, Artemisia goes on to live a haunted marriage. Frances Farmer dies in a fit of rage against her oppressors.

[6] *Jehanne* has the fewest scenes with 21, while *Saint Frances* has the most scenes with 51. Other than *Life*, which has 9 characters, Clark's full-length plays have between 15 (*Wasps*) and 35 (*Saint Frances*) characters.

Notorious for their hybridity, her plays have been received with a great deal of mystification because they are not easily delineated within traditional dramatic genres. Instead, each play is comprised variously of comedic, tragic, farcical, historical, filmic, absurd and even surrealistic elements. For example, *The Trial of Judith K.* has met with a flurry of classifications, including "comic-cartoon," "Marx Brothers," "nihilism," "menace" (Crew C1); "Dada-ism," "surrealism" and "existentialism" (Hersh *n.pag.*). *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* has been described variously as "comic writing," "surrealism" (Conlogue, "Clark's" M8); "chronicle," "lament," "comedy," "absurd," "pattered on Christopher Durang" and a "black comic family saga" (Dykk B8). And *The Widow Judith* has been labeled "clever, superficial satire," a "re-telling of the Biblical story," "television sketch comedy" (Friedlander, "Widow" 69); "black-as-black can be comedy" and "melodramatic" ("Widow" E12).

Saint Frances of Hollywood has received particularly harsh criticism where genre coding is concerned, possibly because its subject matter and atmosphere are so grim, yet its pace clips forward as if it were a farce. The play has been described as "sledgehammer satire" (Morrow B6); "anti-tragedy [...] leavened [...] by mordant black wit" (V. Wagner, "Frances" F7); and "cinematic" (Friedlander, "Saint" 181). Of the Edmonton premiere of *Saint Frances*—which I directed in the spring of 2001 at Walterdale Playhouse—one critic wrote, "It's not so much drama as persecution of the innocent. True, it has a certain black comedy potential.[...] But black comedy isn't the prevailing tone" (Nicholls C5). Another also had difficulty with the juxtaposition of comedic and tragic elements: "There are some funny lines and many of the characters are outrageous but you have to work very hard to find much to laugh at in this heartbreaking story" (MacLean *n.pag.*). A third critic took exception to the play's multiple themes and

their relation to its genres: "Is the work meant to explore alcoholism, a callous mother, a vicious Hollywood system, or the inhumanity of state asylums? [...] It all makes *St. Frances* [*sic*] less tragic than simply pitiful" (McCallum 421).

In all, this variety of responses suggests that because Clark's plays operate on a number of generic levels, they work against themselves. This creates confusion, especially for reviewers assigned to the task of writing a review that must have a single throughline itself. A discussion of genre in Clark's plays is a prickly affair because, as Linda Hutcheon says, "[t]he boarders between literary genres have become fluid [and their] conventions [...] are played off against each other; there is nô simple, unproblematic merging" (9).

Clark's fluid genre perversions remain incomprehensible when traditional classification are applied. In order to group Clark's plays more accurately, we can look to the alternate classifications proposed by Ric Knowles in his reconsideration of contemporary Canadian theatre. In this chapter, Clark's plays will be considered as examples of three post-neo-Aristotelian genres common to contemporary English-Canadian theatre: "historiographic metadrama," "environmental theatre" and most significantly, "dramaturgy of the perverse." A consideration of Clark's full-length plays as grouped within these forms will illuminate, respectively, the ways in which some of her plays deal with received historical or fictive narrative, the ways in which one play includes its audience and the ways in which other of her plays pervert traditional dramatic structures.

Knowles has traced the emergence of neo-Aristotelian dramaturgy in Canada as a postcolonial response to dramatic forms that were prevalent in Britain and America in the mid-twentieth century. In *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning*, Knowles discusses a number of dramatic forms as they have surfaced on Canadian stages since the early seventies. He groups these

forms into three types, two from which this study draws: naturalist plays based on time and process, and modernist plays based on space and shape (the third, "SpaceTime," which is based on Knowles' theory of quantum dramaturgy, falls outside of our discussion). He then considers Canadian plays that "pervert" the traditional structures inherent to each type.

According to Knowles, Aristotelian form relies on two qualities to structure its dramatic action: a "(sadistic) oedipal logic" and a temporal cause-and-effect relationship to justify it (*Theatre* 35). Using as his examples two plays from David French's Mercer trilogy—*Leaving Home* (1972)[7] and *Of the Fields Lately* (1973)—Knowles shows that the women in these plays are objectified and in the end blamed for the men's problems and therefore blamed as the catalyst for the central dramatic conflict by virtue of a temporal reactionary structure in which all blame "logically" leads to them. Aristotelian form therefore relies on a unified, monologic narrative to hold it together. The coupling of the temporal cause-and-effect relationship with the sadistic oedipal logic at the founding level of dramatic form always already inscribes a sense that this is always how the world is, has been and will continue to be, and that the protagonists are "fighting the good fight" not only for themselves but for all who watch the play and for all who came before and will come after. The result is the illusion of "universality" that threatens to silence all other discourses.

English-Canadian theatre of the seventies embraced this tried-and-true Aristotelian dramatic structure as part of a strategy, as Knowles puts it, "to demonstrate its mature ability to employ the dominant dramatic forms and to break free from the tyranny of its cultural 'fathers'" (*Theatre* 37), most prominently its British theatrical roots, but also its contemporary American

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[7] Year following a play title denotes the year of first production. See Works Cited for publication date.

influences. In so doing, Canadian theatre—especially the theatre emerging from Toronto's alternate theatre movement at the time—merely reaffirmed a terrible postcolonial paradox: it adopted a strategy of asserting its independence by doing no more than (re)presenting the forms of the fathers.

But once the alternate theatre movement had solidified its dominance as "the new mainstream" (Johnston 252) in the mid-seventies, a number of playwrights and companies began developing theatre that more consciously questioned not only the narrative forms of the past, but also their own narrative forms. Picking up where plays like Rick Salutin's *1837: The Farmers' Revolt* (1973) and James Reaney's trilogy *The Donnellys* (1973-5) had left off, "historiographic metadrama" such as Rex Deverell's *Beyond Batoche* (1985) and Monique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* (1988-90) not only revisioned past-events in Canadian history, but problematized the notion that our histories have been reduced to mythologies constructed along monologic lines. "Environmental theatre" such as John Krizanc's *Tamara* (directed by Richard Rose; 1981) appealed to audiences' new sense of participation in theatre's dynamic space. And plays such as Judith Thompson's *White Biting Dog* (1984) and George F. Walker's *Nothing Sacred* (1988) reexamined traditional plot structures through a "dramaturgy of the perverse." Like the plays listed above, Clark's plays are founded upon certain dramaturgies that are critically aware of their own positionings, while questioning traditional forms at the level of dramatic structure.

Clark has deftly employed historiographic metadrama—so-labeled for the form's self-reflexive, questioning attitude—in plays such as *Jehanne of the Witches* (1989), *Life Without Instruction* (1991), *Saint Frances of Hollywood* (1994) and *The Widow Judith* (1998), each of which deals with historical or scriptural women

whose stories have been told and retold throughout Western history. While Clark's historical metadramas do not specifically (re)present Canadian content, they do, metaphorically, offer pedagogical or mythological reflections of Canada's social milieu. *Jehanne* problematizes the construction of male authority as "religion" and female authority as "witchcraft" while foregrounding the performativity manifest in the power dynamics of each; *Life* critiques the causes and effects of public opinion on young women in both the social realm and the legal arena while readjusting its narrative points-of-view by linking perspective in life to perspective in art; *Saint Frances* explores the Western world's fascination with Hollywood fame while refusing to place blame *solely* on the producers, the media, the government, the public, the families or the personality herself; and *The Widow Judith* revisions the story of *The Book of Judith* by laying bare the social and sexual politics of religion and war *via* space and time narrativization, and ultimately questions the believability of the heroine's own point-of-view.

Clark's only environmental theatre piece is also her only collaboration. Co-written with Robin Fulford, Daniel MacIvor and John Mighton, and directed by Ken McDougall at Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, *Sleeproom* (1993) literally brought audiences *into* a theatre space transformed into a mental health institution, a space generally viewed as *unpublic*. With actors playing administrators, physicians and "ecologizers" (inmates), audience members were taken through the Passe Muraille building—fashioned as the "Institute of Inner Ecology" (3)[8]—made to fill out questionnaires and collectively introduced to the characters and their habits during the course of the evening, leading up to the play's finale in the "Sleep Room." Here, the audience encountered patients whose sleeping bodies lie, according to the stage directions, "at different levels

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[8] Page numbers for *Sleeproom* correspond to the Playwrights Canada Press publication.

and have an abstract aesthetic appeal. There should be a cool austerity in the position of the sleeping bodies. We don't want it to look like a bunch of people lying around" (72).

In what may seem to be a paradox, *Sleeproom*'s brand of environmental theatre heightens the *separation* of performance and audience by way of its commingling of audience members with characters in a shared performance space. The effect is similar to that found in the environmental plays of Canadian director Richard Rose, in which, says Knowles,

> it is crucial that the [audience-performer] barrier remain intact: [Rose's] interest is in allowing audiences to see performance and behaviour clearly, and from close proximity, and he believes that this is impossible both in life and in theatrical productions in which one is too immediately engaged in the self-conscious process of interaction to see clearly or judge accurately.[...] Rose's productions construct their audiences as voyeurs rather than as participants.
>
> (*Theatre* 186)

On these terms, then, *Sleeproom* stands in stark contrast to Richard Schechner's participatory environmental theatre in that it does not attempt communal relations between the audience and the actors,[9] as is evident from reading the

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[9] Schechner sees *his* environmental theatre as breaking down the aesthetics of "orthodox" theatre. He even qualifies the grounds of participation:

> Participation is legitimate only if it influences the tone and possibly the outcome of the performance; only if it changes the rhythms of the performance. Without this potential for change participation is just one more ornamental, illusionistic device: a treachery perpetrated on the audience while disguised as being on behalf of the audience. [...] Participation doesn't eliminate the formalities of theatre—it goes behind them to fetch private elements into the play. These two systems—the formal and the private—coexist, affecting each other. (77, 78)

patchwork script. Instead, in *Sleeproom* the close proximity of the audience to the performance makes audience members hyperaware of their position outside of the narrative because they have limited control over their immediate space, as Liam Lacey's review reflects: "As tourists, the audience's response is a detached one: moderately bemused, a little bored and occasionally diverted" (C6). As audience members are led through a series of shared spaces, their impulses are to attempt separation from, not participation with, the action (to a place of comfort); this *separation impulse* contrasts with the *inclusion impulse* audience members experience at a traditional proscenium play, in which they attempt to graft their attention onto the play's hero or heroine (from a safe distance). The separation impulse in *Sleeproom* is further heightened by the narrow confines of the playing space. Like Rose's environmental theatre (but unlike Schechner's), *Sleeproom* "employs spaces of entrapment [...] to point up constraint" (Knowles, *Theatre* 187). The result is a strain of dramatic conflict emanating not between the opposing objectives of two characters in performance, but between the opposing objectives of audience members (who attempt separation) and the space in which they are entrapped (which solicits inclusion). However, while the inclusion of audience members in the performing space repoliticizes the space as "real life" and "public," the political agenda of *Sleeproom* remains the product of the production company's intentions, whatsoever they may be. The audience members are invited into that space and encouraged to play according to the ideologies laid out by the company. For audiences to venture outside of these intentions is to venture outside of the intentions of the play.

Sleeproom is Clark's only environmental play and as such is her only play that positions the audience within the playing space. However, its aesthetic has remarkable similarities to her other plays. The limited audience participatory

quality of *Sleeproom* is comparable to the state of the heroines in Clark's other plays, most notably Judith Kaye (*The Trial of Judith K.*), Val (*Wasps*) and Frances Farmer (*Saint Frances of Hollywood*). The heroines in these plays have little control over their journeys and find themselves at the mercy of the objectives of others in a closed and oppressive system.

While some of Clark's plays fall under the rubric of historiographic metadrama, and one under environmental theatre, the majority of her plays are examples of the "dramaturgy of the perverse." Explains Knowles,

> As a structural principle, perversity may usefully be seen as a revisioning of Aristotelian *re*versal (and recognition) as well as an intertextualist (or "interstructuralist") rejection of modernist purity, clarity, and self-containment. Unlike the more familiar concept of *sub*version, however, the perverse is not simply arranged in an oppositional (and therefore affirming) relationship to the dominant. Perversion is dialogic in Bakhtin's sense, more variously disruptive and less simply reactive than the concept of subversion suggests. (*Theatre* 44-5, *emphasis in original*)

Such plays undercut the *status quo*'s ideological safeguards in the very mechanisms of its structure—not simply on the level of theme, plot or fabula[10] but at the level of dramatic form. They go beyond revision, rejection or even parody of the dominant discourse by placing neo-Aristotelian structures in environments that "acknowledge their cultural authority while fracturing and

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[10] My use of the term "fabula" comes from Meike Bal's description: "material or content that is worked into a story, has been defined as a series of events" (7). Similarly, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* makes the distinction that fabula is the "'raw material' of story events as opposed to the finished arrangement of the plot" (80).

misusing it" (45). They also threaten the modernist tradition "in ways that interrogate the ideological interests served by the retreat into 'pure form' that presents itself as neutral, disinterested, and somehow above the realm of social or political interaction" (65). Whereas the rigid "crisis-to-climax-to-resolution" (35) structure of neo-Aristotelian plays is exposed by the dramaturgy of the perverse, this same dramaturgy threatens the modernist tradition's refusal to permit social relevance to mar its "art" from without. Where the dramaturgy of the perverse threatens the temporal stratification of neo-Aristotelian plays, it also threatens the spatial ramparts erected by modernist plays.

Knowles shows that playwrights such as George F. Walker and Judith Thompson are able to comment directly on the very monologicizing structures of "religious, legal, and political authority as well as classical dramatic structures" (45). He then shows that playwrights such as Margaret Hollingsworth, Don Druik, Harry Standjofski and Daniel MacIvor expose the "pure form" of modernism by foregrounding its weaknesses, not the least of which is that as a self-contained form, modernism ultimately leads to a unified, unquestioned and therefore monologicizing ideology of alienation. The remainder of this chapter considers how four of Clark's plays pervert traditional structures, according to Knowles' specific delineations.

Of Clark's plays, *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* (1984), *The Trial of Judith K.* (1985), *Moo* (1988) and *Wasps* (1998) all pervert neo-Aristotelian plot structuring in their account of fictional narratives, going further than mere subversion and reactionism.[11] First, each of these plays "focuses on the *constructed* nature of identity" (45, *italics in original*) to the extent that the audience's understanding of each heroine's identity is often undermined or fragmented. *Lost Souls* follows

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[11] Indeed, in their self-reflexive, questioning attitudes toward the histories they tell, *Jehanne, Life, Saint Frances* and *Widow* could also be viewed as examples of dramaturgy of the perverse.

Hannah's zombie-like wanderings through New York in a post-marital daze, having concluded that she does not conform to the labels of "wife" and "mother"; in *Moo*, the title heroine is committed to an insane asylum by her husband, Harry, who says she is his sister; in *Judith K.*, Judith wakes up to find her personal and professional identity stripped from her by the State; and in *Wasps*, split personalities and conflicting backstories problematize character construction at an epidemic rate. Chapter Two considers in detail how "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman," *Lost Souls* and *Wasps* make use of a number of postmodern narrative strategies to pervert character identity, while Chapter Three considers how *Judith K.* employs spatial ideology to alienate Judith from her own identity.

Second, each of these plays "displaces the symbolic authority of structural principles such as reversal and recognition" (45), often past the point of possible plot tracing. The first act of *Lost Souls*, for example, ends with Mrs. Cape and Nesbitt reading a supposed suicide note apparently written by Mr. Cape. Says Mrs. Cape, "He must have drowned himself. The note says he's going down to the sea so he must have drowned himself" (61).[12] But where? And how? In her frustration, Mrs. Cape checks the closet for his body, but the stage directions read, *"There is no body there"* (61). In fact, Mrs. Cape and Nesbitt do not read enough of the note outloud for the audience to surmise that any suspicious act has taken place at all; this is merely their hasty conclusion. Thus, a key structural moment is undermined because the characters are unsure of the information presented to them and because information is withheld from the audience. *Lost Souls* first employs a complication device at a structurally integral moment, then

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[12] Page numbers for *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* correspond to the Talonbooks publication.

complicates the reliability of the device, thus questioning how we construct reality based on our understanding of traumatic moments in our lives.

Similarly, when Moo is being committed by Harry (*Moo*'s point of attack), it is unclear whose construction of Moo's identity we should believe, Harry's or Moo's. Because the doctor believes Harry and not Moo, it is a moment of complication in the plot structure. But the nature of the complication is undermined because of the identity confusion. Our reading is further destabilized in Harry's speech in the following scene when he reasserts to the doctor that Moo merely has a "vivid imagination" (17)[13].

Judith K.'s Nun in the final scene is set up to be the bearer of "Truth" for Judith, but instead she offers a further complication to Judith's plight. The Nun's "Parable of the Man and the Doorkeeper" is so nonsensical that not only can Judith not comprehend its significance—"Why did you tell me that story? Is there some truth that I'm not grasping" (116)[14]— but neither can the audience. Thus, at a point when we expect all to be revealed by a reliable and pious character, Judith's struggle is further complicated and anticipated resolution is denied.

Of all of Clark's plays, *Wasps* complicates neo-Artistotelian structuring conventions to the greatest extent. Few informative or plot turning moments are left uncomplicated. Chapter Two explores this construction in detail.

Third, each of these plays invariably "disrupts the complacent, voyeuristic, oedipal, or ecstatic satisfactions and containments provided by dramatic catharsis" (45) such that its ending tends to function as a complication instead of a resolution or a restablization of culture values. *Lost Souls* ends with the image of

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[13] Page numbers for *Moo* correspond to the Playwrights Canada Press publication.
[14] Page numbers for *The Trial of Judith K.* correspond to the Playwrights Canada Press publication.

Mr. Cape holding a knife above Hannah following Hannah's seemingly conclusive words, "Then, I realize who he is and what he wants" (125). But Mr. Cape's connection to Hannah's storyline has never been made clear. Thus, instead of wrapping up the mysteries of Hannah's wanderings and Mr. Cape's disappearance, we are left with the notion that we are all wanderers in mysteries/lives with no (re)solutions.[15]

Moo's ending also disrupts catharsis, but it is problematic at the level of character relationship. Following a lifetime of mutual torture in a love/hate relationship, Harry and Moo both pull the trigger of Harry's gun, apparently shooting her through the heart. Her own consent to her death—"*MOO does not resist. She and HARRY pull the trigger*" (131)—works against Moo's lifelong adversarial stance toward Harry. Explains Clark, "it's assisted suicide. It's agreed upon. Like, she wants to die and he agrees to kill her" ("Personal"). The play's next and final scene finds Harry and his new wife Patsy having an acerbic conversation that mirrors many of those between Harry and Moo. The abuse is therefore cyclical[16]—there are many women living lives like that of Moo.

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[15] For Clark, *Lost Soul*'s ending has more to do with mood than plot:

> By the end of the play [Hannah] was complete, and therefore her life was finished, like she had completed her life. The thing is too that my inspiration for writing the play, the woman I knew who had died, it was such a shock because she lived this sort of life that was pleasant, you know, like she had a very nice, safe life and you never would have thought in a million years that she would just suddenly get murdered, right? No one ever did find out who did it. So I wanted to create that shock that I had felt when *I* heard the news.[...] [T]he feeling was almost more important to me than the actual story. I just wanted to get people in that position where they felt that they'd been dealt a blow to the gut ("Personal").

[16] On the point of cyclicality in *Moo*, Clark disagrees. Instead, she sees the final scene as Harry's comeuppance:

> [H]e married these other women because they were easy. Like, they weren't a threat to him, they didn't challenge his soul. They were just people he could live with. So, in the end he realizes he killed the only thing he really loved. And he either killed her physically with a gun, or he realizes he that he had been killing her by *not* acknowledging that she was the women that he should have been with. So, you know, "Life with you *is* a desert island." It's like, "I got my wish," but "it's hell." ("Personal")

Like *Lost Soul*'s Hannah, Judith Kaye is, in the end, stabbed by mysterious agents—the two gas station attendants who had originally arrested her—but the ending is even more esoteric: when Ted enters, Judith exclaims, "Ted! I've been reprieved!" to which Ted responds before leaving again, "I'm ashamed of you, Judith K. You're no different from the rest of them. You just want to live" (119). Judith is operating in a complex system of oppression, an alienation machine that denies closure of all kinds, including death, and denies a fair, or even clear, meaning. This sense is present in all of Clark's perversion plays, but most aggressively in *Judith K.*

Wasps, with its myriad reversals and recognitions, concludes with a character relationship complication which disturbs the play's entire complex structure by denying catharsis. Following their brief but passionate affair, Andrew Blett breaks up with Val saying, "I'm too attracted to you. That's wrong. I shouldn't be that attracted to someone" (107), but the final scene of the play finds Val stamping Andrew's hand librarian-style and exclaiming, "Renewed!" (125). Her sudden forgiveness of Andrew is unjustified in a linear sense because Val's character had not come to any revelation in the interim pertaining to, for example, trust or love. We are left to read her inexplicable reversal as a comment on the "untraceablility" of love; or we may read it as the heroine's determination to start life afresh, a rare sentiment in the dramaturgy of Clark's plays, which tend to forgo optimistic outcomes.

To conclude, each of these plays presents what I call the "Clark twist." As a function of the dramaturgy of the perverse, the Clark twist presents a final scene which forces the audience to reconsider the play's entire trajectory, overall content and even theme. Clark says her plays do not end with an affirmation of the "Truth" of the play; rather, she says,

> I might solve it for myself and there might be a suggestion of *how* it's solved. But I try not to hammer people over the head with it. Like it's not a *message, per se*, it's just a "Let's look at this. Here's a story, I like this story, let's investigate this story further." And then I guess in the end I hope people will take sides. [For example, in *Life Without Instruction*] they'll either think that the father was right in doing what he did to Artemisia, that he *was* trying to protect her in his own twisted way, or that he was this horrible guy. Either way, they could think both things of him. ("Personal")

Structurally, the Clark twist seems foreign, even superfluous, to the play's overall direction. Thematically, it presents an open-endedness that questions the values on which we have, consciously or not, evaluated the play. Generically, it problematizes coding because it tends not to carry with it the humour found in the rest of the play. Ideologically, it implicates the audience among the play's antagonists by suggesting a complicity with the heroine's oppression by virtue of the fact of the audience's own surprise at the twist and therefore its previous complicity with the narrative up to that point. The twist is therefore a threat posed to "the system," and suggests that this complicity extends into the "real lives" of the audience. The Clark twist is unsettling because it denies catharsis in the emotional sense, but also in the logical sense—as does "real life" according to the worldview set out in these plays.

CHAPTER TWO

"CONFABULISTS," NARRATIVISTS, POSTMODERNISTS: CONFLICTING NARRATIVIZATIONS IN CLARK'S PLAYS

> After all, we can only "know" (as opposed to "experience") the world through our narratives (past and present) of it, or so postmodernism argues.
>
> —Linda Hutcheon (128)

As the story goes, when Arlene Mazerolle and Derek Boyes founded Air-Conditioned Theatre in 1994 at the Factory Theatre Studio Café in Toronto, they knew they wanted to produce a play by Sally Clark, but "none [...] quite suited the tandem's needs" (V. Wagner, "WASPS" G3). When they mounted Wallace Shawn's *Marie and Bruce* for the second time that year, Clark attended opening night and later approached them about a possible collaboration. Says Mazerolle, "She just saw something about our group she thought would be right for a play that she had just started writing about personality disorders" (G3). Clark's account of their first meeting falls in line with that of Mazerolle and Boyes: "Arlene Mazerolle and Derek Boyes asked me if I had a play that would be suitable for their company, Air-Conditioned Theatre. I had just started *Wasps*" ("Acknowledgments" in *Wasps* 7). The play premièred there on Sunday, March 24, 1996 with Boyes directing and Mazerolle in the lead role of Val Winton-Smythe. Thus, the story of Clark's eighth full-length play was born.

Wasps was produced a second time by Origins Theatre Projects at the Vancouver Little Theatre in October, 1997, with Clark as director. She may have chosen to direct the play herself following the Toronto production's indifferent

reviews . Of the Toronto production, one reviewer concludes that "Directing this low-budget production [...] proves too much for Derek Boyes [who] leaves his cast shunting furniture around the stage [...] in dim light" (Taylor C4); another also mentions the "awkward set shuffles" (Chapman B4). That Clark may have made this decision is further supported by the fact that she rarely directs her own work.[17]

But the Vancouver production did not fare much better in the eyes of critics. Writes John Armstrong,

> *Wasps* begins with the door-slamming, mistaken personalities and ever-complicating plot of classic farce and warps it further with each minute.
>
> The result is not entirely successful—it's awkwardly constructed and too long—but it's often very funny and some standout performances make the majority of its sins forgivable. (D5)

Following a valiant attempt to reconstruct the play's plot, Armstrong concludes, "Unraveling the actual plot would be tedious and likely incomprehensible. In the end, love triumphs" (D5). Overall, Armstrong's review is favourable, reflecting what had clearly amounted to a positive theatre-going experience for him. However, he struggles to find words to describe a play that is based on so many plot twists and reversals that the plot itself is almost untraceable.

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[17] Clark has left the directing duties to such names as Jackie Maxwell (*Moo*), Morris Panych (*The Trial*), Clarke Rogers (*Lost Souls and Missing Persons, Jehanne of the Witches*), Richard Greenblatt (*The Trial of Judith K.*), Charlotte Lee (*Saint Frances of Hollywood*), Brian Richmond (*The Widow Judith*) and Glynis Leyshon (*Moo, Life Without Instruction*). Leyshon in particular has what Katherine Bracht calls "a good, symbiotic working relationship" with Clark (38). Before directing *Wasps* in Vancouver, Clark's last direction of her work was, in fact, her first play "Ten Ways to Abuse An Old Woman."

By stating that "Unraveling the actual plot would be tedious and likely incomprehensible," Armstrong ironically points out a central, unifying force in Clark's play: as in Clark's other works, the problematics of narrative conflict and its potential for generating dramatic conflict are unifying forces in *Wasps*. For Clark, conflict is paramount in her plays:

> I guess, to me, drama's about conflict.[...] In conflict, if you boil it down, it winds up one person has the power and one person doesn't: a battle of will. Two people want something, the conflict is they fight to get it, one person wins. So that can be translated into, "this person's the victim and this person's the victimizer." But it can also be translated into, "they're struggling for power and this one gets power over the other," which to me is the essence of drama. So it's all about conflict. ("Personal")

This chapter focuses on four of Clark's plays—"Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman," *Lost Souls and Missing Persons*, *Wasps* and *Life Without Instruction*—to show how narratives conflict *intra*textually and *inter*textually as strategies for creating dramatic action and as strategies for fictionalizing "fact," respectively.[18] In particular, narrative inscription, narrative misinterpretation (character-character, character-audience and multiple misinterpretations), *anti*-narrativization, labeling, sustained narrativization and Clark's own term "confabulations" (that is, lies) are considered as subsets of narrative conflict. In

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[18] I have chosen these four plays because of the clarity with which strategies of narrative conflict and "narrativization" are developed in each. But it should be kept in mind that these strategies are by no means exclusive to these plays alone in Clark's *oeuvre*.

To clarify, I use *intra*textual to mean the interrelations of a single text, including how dialogue, character, conflict and theme operate within a script, as opposed to *inter*textual material which makes allusions to other sources.

all, narrative conflict is active in the construction of dialogue, character relationships, theme and in all elements that contribute to the polyvocal form and content of Clark's dramatic action. Furthermore, the Clark twist denies narrative and moral resolution. Clark's plays amount to structural perversions of neo-Aristotelian play structuring and are therefore more accurately reflective of our contemporary milieu.

Clark's dramaturgical strategy of setting up opposing narratives as a catalyst for conflict is introduced in her early one-act play, "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman" (1983). In "Ten Ways," a daughter's frustration with her elderly mother's declining mental state leads to a darkly comic examination of the line between "happiness" and "reality." Throughout the play's sixteen episodic scenes the daughter scolds her mother, the Old Woman, for a variety of transgressions, including watching the French channel at high volume although she does not speak French, laughing at jokes at the wrong time, repeatedly making hard-boiled eggs, confusing the living room with the kitchen, wearing dress shoes that are too tight for her feet and sitting in the dark by herself while there is a party in the other room. In each instance, it is difficult to know whether the Old Woman acts out of malice or as a result of senility. It is this debate—a question of labeling—which carries us through the play. Even when the audience sees the activities of the Old Woman when the daughter does not, the Old Woman's motivation is unclear: not passing on phone messages to her daughter and taking out her hearing aid before meeting her daughter are two of the Old Woman's random acts of malice/senility when the daughter is absent. It is in the Old Woman's *laughs* and *smiles* that we might see clues to the extent of her cunning and awareness of the events around her, but we cannot be sure.

"Ten Ways" presents us with one of Clark's early characters, the daughter, struggling to inscribe a narrative onto a situation, in this case her deteriorating relationship with her mother. Clark is interested in asking the question, Whose narrative of the situation is accurate? Is it the narrative of the abusive daughter and her friend George, both of whom argue from a position of so-called "commonsense," or is it the narrative of the Old Woman, of which we catch a brief glimpse when the three are at the dinner table?

> OLD WOMAN. We're all in this world to be happy. Ho ho ho.
>
> GEORGE. That's it! You're right, enough's enough. She has got to go!
>
> OLD WOMAN. Because what sort of place would it be if people weren't happy.
>
> GEORGE. People aren't happy.
>
> OLD WOMAN. What?
>
> GEORGE. PEOPLE AREN'T HAPPY.
>
> OLD WOMAN. Oh. That's too bad. We're all in this world to be happy. Ho ho ho.
>
> GEORGE. People aren't happy, goddamn it. You're happy.
>
> OLD WOMAN. Yes. I am happy.
>
> GEORGE. Well, you're the only person who is happy. The only person in the whole wide world. (211)[19]

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[19] Page numbers for "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman" correspond to the Coach House Press printing in *Canadian Brash.*

Though the Old Woman aspires to happiness, certainly an admirable if not idealistic desire, George and the daughter go on to remind her of her decade-long depression twenty years ago when her husband died:

> DAUGHTER. CHARLIE. YOUR HUSBAND. MY FATHER. Charlie died and you were very unhappy. For years.
>
> OLD WOMAN. (*mulls it over*) But, I'm happy now.
>
> DAUGHTER. Yes, yes, you're happy now. It's because you don't have a brain anymore. You're just an old shell who used to be my mother. You laugh and smile at everything. Of course, you're happy now.
>
> OLD WOMAN. (*thinks it over*) I could be crabby. (212-13)

Throughout the play, the daughter and George want the Old Woman to be more aware of her present circumstances and of her past. But by the end of this scene, due to the daughter's and George's belligerence, the audience challenges the notion that the Old Woman would be better off remembering her past at all, or being more aware of her present circumstances and remembering who she is.

Thus, two narratives are put at odds with one another: the first narrative is that of the daughter and George who have labeled the Old Woman "senile," needing to be dealt with through strong language; the antithesis of this narrative is that of the Old Woman who finds happiness in her blissful ignorance. Clark's dramaturgy refuses to privilege either side, simultaneously favouring an emotional attachment to the Old Woman and the "logical" conclusions of the daughter and George.

"Ten Ways" offers an example of Clark's use of polyvocality in her narrative constructions. By allowing two narratives to coexist without resolution the play does not construct "a single world and a single unitary language," as Mikhail Bakhtin has asserted for traditional dramatic structures (*Dialogic* 405). Instead, characters' differing narrativizations of each other's identities and of their positions in their "world" clash and jar along the lines of the dramaturgy of the perverse. In such a play,

> Multiple language strategies and sources coexist in the play. Characters and narratives within the script may contain diverse interests or objectives, expressed in different speech forms. Polyvocality resists the notion of a single or dominant point-of-view. (Castagno 12)

The characters' backstories and the world that the audience apprehends are polyvocal as a result of multiple and conflicting narrative in the characters' dialogue. The response to a polyvocal script like "Ten Ways" is often one of confusion concerning the very grounds on which the play functions, as we have seen in Armstrong's review of *Wasps*. However, polyvocality allows Clark's plays to more closely represent our fragmented culture. The audience, not the playwright, is placed in a position to judge which narrative is legitimate.[20]

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[20] This view argues *against* Mikhail Bakhtin's assertion that

> Pure drama strives toward a unitary language, one that is individualized merely through dramatic personae who speak it. Dramatic dialogue is determined by a collision between individuals who exist within the limits of a single world and a single unitary language. (*Dialogic* 405)

It is only in the last two decades that critics have considered the relevance of Bakhtin's writings to drama; since then the numbers have multiplied exponentially. It seems that a subset of Bakhtinian criticism has evolved into being, dedicated to using Bakhtin's words on drama and dialogism against his own conclusions. These critics include Marvin Carlson, who asserts that Bakhtin's "central concepts have distinctly dramatic overtones" (313); Helene Keyssar,

In "Ten Ways," as in Clark's other plays, the ending augments the mystery more than resolves it. We find the Old Woman sitting motionless in the dark and the daughter and George contemplating whether or not she is dead. They decide to put a blanket over the Old Woman, say "goodnight" and leave (215). This final objectification of the Old Woman has a darkly humourous effect and works against a resolution of the malice/senility dialectic. The protagonist/antagonist dialectic is not only blurred but given no resolution.

Clark's one-act is a polyvocal drama at the level of dramatic action—a drama in which conflicting voices are given full range to speak, where synthesis is not the ultimate conclusion to the conflict. This final state of open-endedness brings "Ten Ways'" scenes closer to audience members' realities so that they may reconsider multiple interpretations in their own lives in terms of elder abuse, frustration and questions of identity construction.

Narrative is also the basis for generating conflict in Clark's *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* (1984). Even more than in "Ten Ways," the characters in Clark's first full-length play grasp for narrative satisfaction to explain their mysterious and tragic circumstance, only to meet with further conflict and disappointment. *Lost Souls* traces the life of Hannah Halstead from the age of thirteen when she daydreams that her future married life might be empty, through to her empty marriage, her surreal wanderings in New York[21], her acceptance by a talkative,

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who asserts that Bakhtin's concepts—dialogism, heteroglossia, carnivalization and others—are "not just applicable to drama but centred in the most elemental attributes of dramatic forms" (89); and Ilkka Joki, who has gone so far as to say that "drama, and the live voice of theatre, can be even more dialogic than the novel," which was Bakhtin's primary focus (64-5).

This study does not, however, propose that all of Clark's characters are *multivocal* in and of themselves. That is, Clark's characters tend to be *unified* in construction and do not reveal "multiple speech strategies in a single character" (Castagno 11) as Paul C. Castagno has asserted for playwrights such as Mac Wellman and Len Jenkins (17-34). The multiple-personality characters discussed in the section on *Wasps* are exceptions.

[21] I asked Clark why she chose to set *Lost Souls* in New York:

> Because that's a great place to disappear in, don't you think? [*laughs*] I mean, you couldn't find them. If they disappeared in Vancouver, you might find them, right? [*laughs*][And

self-possessed painter named Turner and finally her highly symbolic death at the hands of Mr. Cape. Parallel to Hannah's story is the story of Mr. Cape, whose disappearance is similarly suspicious and whose estranged wife and developmentally challenged son Nesbitt bungle their way through public grief. Mrs. Cape eventually finds closure when she is convinced by Major Sweeny of the Salvation Army that her husband is dead. The audience is led to believe otherwise when Mr. Cape secretly appears after his "death," and in the final scene as we see Mr. Cape raising a knife above Hannah. As in many of her plays, Clark experiments with the order of events so that while the story is structured around Hannah's disappearance in New York, a number of flashback scenes explain why she might have wanted to leave her fickle and unappreciative husband Lyle in the first place, including his request to have an affair, her boredom with him and, most significantly, the distance she perceives between them.

As in "Ten Ways," Clark's characters in *Lost Souls* construct stories about events that lead them into humourous conflict with one another. Here, narrative conflict concerns Hannah's disappearance and the events leading up to it. For example, when Lyle approaches the Salvation Army to find out if Hannah is on their "Found" persons list, he enters into a near-farcical discussion about labeling with Major Sweeny:

> SWEENY. Nine times out of ten it's suicide. (*pulls out another enormous wad of paper*) All these people here. All suicides. Most of them match most of these. (*pulls out "Missing" wad*)
>
> LYLE. Why don't you put them in your "Found" file?

Toronto's] not *scary*, right? At the time I wrote the play, New York was [...] *really* dangerous." ("Personal")

SWEENY. Because they're not "Found." They're "Dead."

LYLE. Well, why don't you take them out of the "Missing" file?

SWEENY. Yes. I should. I really should. Haven't had time lately. Completely bogged down. Besides, it's not my job. It's Mrs. Cape's job.

LYLE. Why doesn't she do it?

SWEENY. She should. She really should. But, she's been bogged down, too. (110)

Lyle attempts to construct a narrative of Hannah that does not end with her being placed in the "Dead" file. But despite Lyle's attempts to find answers, neither Sweeny nor his files can provide the facts of the case. Lyle's need to discover the story behind Hannah's disappearance leads to an attempt at "narrativization," a device which is central to the dramatic structure of Clark's plays.

Linda Hutcheon uses the term "narrativization" interchangeably with "narrative" in her discussion of the process of retelling history in the context of historiographic metafiction and the postmodern.[22] Here, I appropriate "narrativization" to (re)present a specific phenomenon manifest as a character-based device to create dramatic conflict. By narrativization I mean the act resulting from our inherent need or compulsion to select events and assign an order to these events to convey a particular (consciously or subconsciously biased) meaning to an addressee. This "addressee" in drama is at once another character in the play and the play's collective, actual spectators, auditors or readers. Narrativization offers another way to consider point-of-view and

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[22] The entry for the word in the index of *A Poetics of Postmodernism* appears interchangeably as "narrative/narrativization" (265).

objective as inherently performative functions of storytelling while maintaining Hutcheon's sense of the process of forming narrative within—and to explain—histories. Narrativization differs from narration in that it foregrounds the speaker's *predisposition* to (re)construct a series of events for the purpose of understanding or communicating them. As Jean-François Lyotard notes, "It is not inconceivable that the recourse to narrative is inevitable.[...] [I]t is necessary to admit an irreducible need for history" (28). By extension, then, narrativization in drama represents our own need to construct narratives to understand our "reality."

Clark's characters in general possess misdirected compulsions to narrativize in order to explain their situations. But these narrativizations inevitably complicate their situations further. If Lyle's desire to narrativize Hannah's disappearance builds the major dramatic conflict of the play, then Sweeny's nonchalant stance becomes an *anti*-narrativization. Sweeny's filing of suicide cases with the "Missing" cases is more a product of lazily passing on the duties to his assistant than a conscious, antagonistic objective related to Lyle's or Hannah's disappearance. In this way, Sweeny is primarily a functionary character—a dramaturgical device—for showing how mistakes occur and lives are ruined when the "buck is passed" in a society that is predisposed to alienating its citizens.

Labeling like this is more than a question of semantics in Clark's dramaturgy; it is also a cause of routine alienation. By excusing himself from moving the suicide cases from the "Missing" file to the "Found" file, Sweeny blurs the discourse's "official" line between found and missing, thereby presenting the play's central theme: the struggle to construct identity to reach out to others in an alienating world. This use of alienation is underscored by the

fact that Sweeny passes on his duties to his subordinate, thus deferring the locus of responsibility elsewhere. Lyle's scene with Sweeny represents his quest not only to find his missing wife but, in a metaphorical sense, to understand who she really is/was. In this sense, *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* is a quest allegory in which Lyle narrativizes Hannah's situation in order to bridge the gap in their relationship, in order to understand her better, even if it is too late for reconciliation. The play is, in fact, an early attempt by Clark to explore the symptoms of alienation in an impersonal world.

Hannah's disappearance in *Lost Souls* becomes the departure point for a philosophical exploration of isolation. Clark fashions the introspective Hannah/Turner scenes in what might be described as anti-locations, very much separated, both literally and stylistically, from the other, more "real" scenes of the play.[23] Though Hannah speaks only gibberish when she is with Turner in this world, when she is alone her monologues reveal a deep personal struggle:

> He doesn't even know my name and he's in love with me. This is ridiculous. You can't fall in love with someone when you don't know them. He shouldn't be in love with me. It's nice though. No one's ever looked at me like that, before. No one's ever told me I was beautiful. (119)

These images of distance and the struggle to really *know* a person refer to Turner here, but they also reveal Hannah's reasons for leaving Lyle. And even though there is no real dialogue between the two, Hannah finds in Turner a man who

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[23] The only Hannah/Turner scene located in a public place is act 1 scene 12 when the two are on a street on the Bowery in New York (47). But this scene too is part of Hannah's post-Lyle, gibberish-speaking haze.

notices her more than Lyle. Hannah finds solace with a man who speaks to her and thinks about her, whereas Lyle never did. We see Hannah critically reflecting on Turner's narrativizations of their relationship. It is also the first point in the play that we see Hannah may indeed have left Lyle of her own accord and that her motivation was his neglect of her. This is foreshadowed in the first scene of Act Two when Hannah wakes from a nightmare and does not recognize Lyle.

Turner's continuous construction of his relationship with Hannah, whom he labels "Zombie," is the most sustained narrativization in *Lost Souls* and it leads to the objectification of Hannah. Throughout his seven monologues, Turner (re)constructs Hannah as "a living breathing work of art" (41) of which he is now in possession. In a heavily ironic monologue about his ex-lover Abeetha, Turner says,

> I cared about her. Sure, I did. But I got tired of being treated like an object. That's what I was to her. An object. I didn't exist, except as a piece of manufactured goods. An otherwise reliable product that kept getting misfiled. People file you, Zombie. They size you up, put you in a box and expect you to stay there. And they get very angry when you leave or when you try to change their filing system. Anyway, you can't go through life being treated as an object, can you, Zombie? (75)

More than foreshadowing Lyle's discussion with Major Sweeny about filing/labeling Hannah, Turner refers to the condition of Clark's protagonists—that of objectification. As in "Ten Ways," objectification is the result of

characters' narrativizations. As is fitting for his occupation, Turner paints for us in words his rendering of Hannah as a beautiful woman with whom he is madly in love, a woman whose real past is perceived as a threat to his rendering of her. He makes this clear when he describes her tweed skirt:

> It's big and green and pleated and has a huge checked pattern. That's the one thing that disturbs me about her. That big green skirt. I guess it's because it's the one thing that illustrates what sort of woman she was. Before she became Zombie. And I'm not sure that I like it. (40)

In semiotic terms, the narrativized objectification of Hannah and her situation by Turner is facilitated by Hannah's refusal to offer a range of verbal signs for Turner to incorporate into his narrative. By limiting her responses to gibberish when he is around, she operates outside of the code used by Turner (i.e. the English language). Like Hannah with Lyle, Turner eventually grows to be frustrated by Hannah's unresponsiveness. Dramatic conflict is the result.

But Turner soon realizes that he is objectifying her: "Sometimes, I wonder what goes on in your head.[...] Am I a keeper, an owner, a possessor? What am I to you?" (89). And, as invariably occurs during the rendering of any work of art, an image of the artist himself emerges through his own discourse:

> I like to go out and do things but I kept attracting people who turned into unyielding lumps.[...] They always said they wanted to get to know me better. Abeetha, Ouzo, all the rest of them. "You're so shy. You never say anything." Well, I talk. They were kind of

> hoping I wouldn't. I'm a little shy at first but get me started and I can't shut up. Well, you know that, Zombie. (74)

It is difficult to believe Turner likes to "go out and do things," just as it would be difficult to accuse him of shyness. The sustained narrativization of his relationship with Hannah is comical in its naïveté. It also serves to problematize the audience's understanding of Hannah's character and situation.

Thus, Clark's *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* is polyvocal at the level of dramatic action in that it allows multiple narrativizations of the heroine's constructed identity, by way of labeling, to exist simultaneously in its discourse. These conflicting narrativizations are intrinsic to the generation of conflict in the play. This multiplicity of character identification is never permitted to be resolved dialectically. *Wasps* operates in a similar fashion, but perverts not only traditional character constructions but traditional plot constructions as well.

If "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman" and *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* explore Clark's early use of narrativization as a dramaturgical device, then the farcical romp *Wasps: A Drawing Room Comedy for Distempered Times* (1996) is Clark's *magnum opus* to narrativization as a human symptom. Although *Wasps* follows the "story" of Val Winton-Smythe, all of the characters in the play struggle to makes sense of their world with humorously contrasting interpretations. Misunderstandings, assumptions and "confabulations" (Sondra's politically correct word for "lies"; 33[24]) carry the play's discourse. In fact, *Wasps'* major dramatic conflicts are built upon and revealed through absent or differing narrativizations of events in past and present, and mimetic and diegetic, space.

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[24] Page numbers for *Wasps* correspond to the Talonbooks publication.

Wasps begins with a conversation between two newlyweds, Val and Cyril, concerning Cyril's family and his occupation as a mathematics professor. It quickly becomes apparent that the two had a whirlwind courtship, and now that they live together in Val's apartment, she is discovering his "quirks" (Cyril's word, 12). As the play develops, these quirks, most notably Cyril's mysterious sexual promiscuity and the "harem" (Sondra's word, 24) he apparently keeps, become central to the play's development. Cyril's sex drive has all but evaporated in the three days they have been married, and Val's worst fear, that Cyril is cheating on her, proves to be understated: Cyril turns out to be *married* to the travel agent Sondra who is the other personality of Cyril's sister, Samantha. Samantha, we discover in the end, is married to Cyril's other personality, Cyril X, whose real name is Lyle.

In the meantime, in an effort to make Cyril desire her more, Val, a stereotypical librarian (at least in appearance) crops and dyes her hair blonde and buys new glasses and new clothes. When this strategy fails to entice Cyril, Val finds sexual satisfaction with Andrew Blett, the library's most "notorious" Delinquent Borrower (37). Andrew leaves her the very next day with the curiously tragicomical comment, "I shouldn't be that attracted to someone" (107). The play concludes with Marge—a "celibate lesbian" (50) who becomes Val's mentor when Val is forced to relocate to the library's Special Services' Book Collections department—leading Andrew back to Val, who is doing library circulation duties in Cyril X's basement. Following a doom-and-gloom soliloquy about the seasons that concludes, "[In winter] it gets really cold. All the time. And everything DIES!" (124), Val "*takes* ANDREW*'s hand and stamps it,*" exclaiming, "Renewed!" (125).

This synopsis surely reinforces Armstrong's comment concerning the difficulties of "unraveling the actual plot" of *Wasps*. Even the very premise of the play—the whirlwind marriage of Val and Cyril—turns out to be invalid when, as Sondra foreshadows (24, 33, 87), we discover that Cyril already has a wife—Sondra herself. At the moment we learn Cyril may already be married we are presented with a destabilization of the play's very "spine." It is no longer *a play about a librarian who marries a mathematics professor*; it is about a woman (Val) whose recent past may have been constructed on the terms of a misidentified Other (Cyril). Evident here are the problematics of producing narrative from fabula when one (Armstrong and myself included) attempts to retell a story from a sequence of events. In other words, this synopsis foregrounds the very problem of narrativization.

Conflicting narrativizations in the plot destabilize audiences' understanding of the action in *Wasps*. Rarely is there consensus on what *is* and *has* actually taken place. Clark introduces character-audience narrative misinterpretation immediately. *Wasps* opens with Val on the phone to her mother:

> Hi. Guess what, Mum! I'm married!! Isn't that exciting! (*slight pause*) Well I think it's exciting. His name's Cyril. Cyril Winton-Smythe. Of course, he's nice. Now don't get upset. It was just too exciting. He swept me off my feet. I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love! Don't cry, Mum. Bye. Say hi to Dad. (*hangs up*). (10)

We then discover that, along with Cyril, we have made an erroneous assumption: Val had not been speaking with her mother; rather, she had been

leaving a message on her parents' answering machine. On one level, then, the world of the characters is not easily comprehended or narrativized by the audience; in fact, their world rejects narrativization.

But the characters also mislead each other *vis-à-vis* their narrativizations. At the level of character narrativization, the newlyweds know nothing about each other's histories. But when Val is told that Cyril *may* already be married, her central positioning in the narrative of the play is destabilized: she cannot be defined as a self-determining Subject but rather as yet another Object of Cyril's passive-aggressive jurisdiction over his "harem." The antecedent action has been problematized. Just as Hannah and Lyle and Hannah and Turner are unaware of each other's past, and the Old Woman in "Ten Ways" is unaware of her own past, Cyril's past for Val remains an enigma.

There are, in fact, three characterizations of Cyril that are constructed in *Wasps*. First, Sondra proves to be the most revealing character in her narrativization of Cyril because she seems to be most in tune to the contradictions of the play. This is partly because she, along with her other personality, Samantha, is the most aggressive instigator of conflict within the play's dramatic action. Val's dispute with Sondra at the library proves to be a particularly layered example of her instigating/revealing trait:

> VAL. Cyril has never lied to me.
>
> SONDRA. He leaves things out, though, doesn't he. Little things like me, Caroline, Denise, Rudolfo—
>
> VAL. It was unimportant.
>
> SONDRA. Bury the past, eh.
>
> VAL. Yes.

SONDRA. Why did you chop your hair off and bleach it?

VAL. A change.

SONDRA. Cyril asked you to, didn't he?

VAL. So what if he did?

SONDRA. Nothing. (*laughs*) (35)

Narratives about Cyril's past are in conflict here, a direct result of Sondra's earlier admission that she is Cyril's lover. Thus, in the first narrativization we have Sondra constructing herself as Cyril's lover, Cyril as the leader of a "harem" of lovers but with "no sex drive" (24) and Val as the newest member of that "harem." Sondra appears to speak from experience, but reveals information only when pressed by Val. And her accuracy is uncanny when she points out that it was Cyril who must have asked Val to change her hairstyle. Sondra is therefore placed in a superior position to the other characters (save for Cyril, of course) because of the special knowledge she has about Cyril. As unsettling as it is, Sondra's narrative may be closest to the "Truth" of the play.

In the second narrativization we have Cyril, who leaves his own construction of his identity in relative ambiguity. He says "I don't know what you're talking about" when Val accuses him of having a lover and responds, when pressed, by saying Sondra is in fact his "stalker [...] for years" (28). To an even greater extent than Sondra's superior position to Val, Cyril's withholding of information gives him power over his "harem." His earlier comment, "we don't know each other yet" (12) is not so much an open invitation to communicate with Val as it is his desired permanent condition; the "yet" is rhetorical.

In the third narrativization we have Val who is suspicious and defensive but believes in Cyril as an ultimately "Good" person with motivations she has

yet to "discover" (12). She believes Cyril when he says Sondra is not his "lover" but his "stalker." Val's struggle is twofold: to find out who her husband really is from outside sources *and* to have him admit (or at least respond) to her allegations. In other words, the construction of meaning in Val's "new" world—her post-wedding world—is entirely dependent on her collecting information about her husband from conflicting and unreliable sources, which both Sondra and Cyril himself appear to be.

Our point-of-view is destabilized because we cannot trust even the heroine's narrativization of the events due to her reliance on the other characters for information. Indeed, we cannot accept any character's interpretation of "reality." Thus, the major dramatic question in *Wasps*—that is, the question the audience seeks to have answered at the conclusion of the play—is posed: What should Val fear about Cyril? However, it is not the major dramatic question, but rather the play's ceaseless series of reversals at the levels of dramatic action and character identity, which drive the play forward.

The problematics of multiple interpretations concerning the same phenomenon can be presented in ontological terms. All interpretation is contingent on the present and very personal circumstances of the subject who "bears witness" to events and who, later, relates them to others. Jürgen Habermas, following C. S. Peirce, states that "Facticity, reality, and qualitative manifoldness must be grounded in immediately present states of consciousness, and yet they do not represent anything, they have no correspondence in reality" (99). The result is that we are led to question the multiple "realities" of *Wasps'* characters and all of their "Truths" because "What corresponds only to private determinations of a continuous stream of consciousness is not 'real'" (99).

As with "Ten Ways" and *Lost Souls*, characters in *Wasps* attempt to inscribe meaning onto each other by way of labeling within their narrativizations. Instances of labeling represent implicit attempts to connect with others in a world that rejects unified discourse. One striking example of how labeling is used by characters as a tactic to comprehend their "realities" is found in the dialogue between Val and Sondra at the library:

> SONDRA. But not everything I say is true. Part of my illness. I'm a confabulist.
>
> [...]
>
> VAL. A what?
>
> SONDRA. A confabulist. We embellish events. My doctor says it's because of memory loss. I don't remember the true event so I make something up.
>
> VAL. You mean you're a liar?
>
> SONDRA. That is a derogatory term and one which the confabulists are seeking to eliminate.
>
> VAL. But that's what you do. You tell lies.
>
> [...]
>
> SONDRA. No. I CONFABULATE! You're a Neo-rightist Wasp bigot, aren't you?
>
> VAL. I'm a what?
>
> SONDRA. I bet you call little people midgets.
>
> VAL. Only if they ARE midgets. Otherwise I call them DWARVES.
>
> SONDRA. BIGOT!
>
> VAL. LIAR! (33-4)

Beyond poking fun at political correctness in this scene, Clark selects a problematic label for Sondra in "confabulist." The word "confabulate," which actually means "talk together informally and intimately," comes from the Latin *com*, indicating "together," and *fabula*, meaning "fable" (*Gage*). This meaning is remarkably contrary to Clark's use of the word as one who embellishes events. While the link to narrativization is clear with its emphasis on fabula, Clark has appropriated the label by adding to it an altogether original denotation. By equating "confabulate" with "lie," Clark foregrounds the inseparability of storytelling and untruths.

Thus, *Wasps* works against neo-Aristotelian plot structuring by blurring action and backstory through conflicting narrativizations, thus blurring unified character construction. In all of its forms this blurring comments on the impossibility of formulating identity in "real life."

In all, "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman," *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* and *Wasps* are stories about stories—about how individuals may be contemporaries and lead interwoven lives, but construct their own "realities" to comprehend others and their relationships with each other. These plays humorously show us that our world is not founded on classical values such as unwavering Truth. They are plays built on stories told by characters lost in an alienating world.

But Clark's characters are not alone in dealing with constructions of "Truth." By rewriting histories in her historiographic metadramas, Clark herself takes on preceding historical fabula to produce narrativizations at the intertextual level. By explicitly treating received histories not as hard fact but as fabula for fiction-writing, Clark is able to move away from traditional dramatic

forms that reaffirm dominant narratives and add to the illusion of a monologic history. By maintaining an explicit self-criticism in her plays, *vis-à-vis* her darkly ironic humour, Clark foregrounds her narrativization approach not as *the* history, but *a* (hi)story among many.[25]

In many dramatic forms, characters' backstories are essential to a play's introductory material. Early naturalist drama relies on heavy expository material before its action begins. Such fabula constructs the audience's understanding of characters' backstories, and the sum of these stories makes up a play's overall narrative. In his discussion of tragedy—which holds great significance for our understanding of dramatic plot, and therefore narrative—Aristotle asserts that tragedy "is an imitation of *an action* that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude" (36, *italics mine*). This assertion came to prescribe a singular action as the foundation of well-wrought drama. This singular action unfolds from the singular point-of-view of one protagonist—that is, it attempts the illusion of a singular, dominant narrativization in drama and, metonymically, a monologic "reality." If neo-Aristotelian plays remain the dominant form in our theatre culture today, it is precisely because of the centrality of narrative to our society.

Hutcheon's discussion of "historiographic metafiction"—that is, "imaginative reconstruction" in the writing of "real" history—holds great significance for the study of Clark's plays and intertextuality in *fiction*. Hutcheon claims that the postmodern approach to writing history "puts into question, at the same time as it exploits, the grounding of historical knowledge in the past real" (92). The retelling of past events always already involves the creative

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[25] In her book review of Clark's *Jehanne of the Witches*, Deborah Cottreau writes that *Jehanne* "contains a self-reflexive element [and] blurs the line between history and fiction in its own distinct way" (82).

faculties of the storyteller because history is "an entity producing meaning" (Haidu 188) which shapes the narratives of the present as much as present narratives reshape our view of the past. Even historiographers, the "official" storytellers we acknowledge as employing a sort of scientific system of discovery in dealing with past events and artifacts, must imaginatively reconstruct the information they encounter, "reshaping [...] our experience of time through plot configurations" (Hutcheon 100).[26] This is why, in citing examples from novels and poetry that explicitly question the order and interpretation of events described, Hutcheon concludes that narrativization "has come to be seen as a central form of human comprehension" (121).[27]

Similar to historiographers, storytellers such as Clark imaginatively reconstruct (fictive) fabula. But Clark has been accused of tampering with historical fact in at least one of her adaptation plays. In "Reconstructing Artemisia," Laura Benedetti asserts that Clark "sacrifices historical concerns for the sake of dramatic effect" (48) when she dramatizes the life of Italian Renaissance painter Artemisia Gentileschi in *Life Without Instruction*. Benedetti argues that while Artemisia has become a "feminist icon" over the past century (45), Clark chooses to sacrifice two important matters of historical record "at the altar of artistic freedom" (48): by having Tassi undergo torture during the trial and by including a confession by Tassi that he himself murdered the painter Caravaggio—both fabula that never occurred in "real life"—Clark is not only unfaithful to Artemisia's life, but as such impedes her "true" story from teaching

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[26] This problematization of the historiographers' relationships to present knowledge runs parallel to Habermas's "present states of consciousness." Both position the speaker/interpreter as the subject and the information represented as the object of study. In other words, both lead to the conclusion that all histories are subjective narrativizations.

[27] Mieke Bal discusses the "omnipresence of narrative in culture," asserting that "practically everything in culture has a narrative aspect to it, or at the very least, can be perceived, interpreted as narrative" (220).

us lessons about our present time. Benedetti's study concludes by accusing Clark of not writing into her work an "awareness of the risks of interpretation" (59).[28]

But Benedetti's conclusions are premature in that while she exposes two infidelities, she fails to trace the "self-criticism" that is in fact active in *Life*. The following is the trial scene of which Benedetti speaks:

> INTERROGATOR. We don't like to do this but it appears to be necessary.
>
> *He pulls out the torture instrument—"Les sybilles"—thumbscrews that go around the fingers.*
>
> ORAZIO. You're going to torture my daughter?! Why don't you torture that bastard! (*points to TASSI*)
>
> INTERROGATOR. (*while adjusting instrument*) We've tried it. Torture is completely ineffectual on a man of his character. The defendant has aggressively maintained that he didn't know your daughter. However, we had a brief conversation with his friend, Giambattista Stiatessi and he confirmed that they were acquainted.
>
> TASSI. (*to GIAMBATTISTA*) WHAT!
>
> *GIAMBATTISTA shrugs.*
>
> INTERROGATOR. Anyway, Signore Gentileschi, these are mild instruments. They merely serve to get the truth out of her.
>
> (138-39)

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[28] Benedetti's study examines how six writers "reinterpret Artemisia's unique story" (44): Maria Ángels Anglada, Jauda Ramis, Agnès Merlet, Alexandra Lapierre, Anna Banti and Sally Clark.

Clark's rewriting of the trial scene has to do with setting up a joke—an ironic parody—on Tassi's character. The Interrogator's meaning when he says, "We've tried. Torture is completely ineffectual on a man of his character," is double: on the one hand, Tassi's character is of such a high standing that even torture cannot tarnish it; and on the other hand, Tassi is such a cruel man that he apparently enjoyed the torture. The two meanings are contradictory: the former suggests an honourable character, the latter a corrupt character. The effect is illustrative of Clark's viciously ironic humour: the Interrogator admits to Tassi's predisposition to cruelty while stating his biased high esteem for him. Moreover, the fact that Tassi's torture occurs in diegetic space admits Clark's privileging of the Artemisia story, presented in mimetic space. The torture of Tassi is merely alluded to in an off-handed comment; its significance to the overall narrative is minimal.

Benedetti's second accusation, concerning the fictitious murder of Caravaggio—one of the Italian Renaissance's most renowned painters—at the hands of Tassi, also fails to account for Clark's self-critical, ironic style. In the scene following the trial, Orazio proposes a toast to Artemisia (Bella):

> ORAZIO. (*stands up*) To Bella! She will be the greatest painter in all Rome. She will surpass Caravaggio!
>
> TASSI. Caravaggio's dead, Ratzo.
>
> ORAZIO. What?
>
> TASSI. He died over a year ago in a knife fight.
>
> ORAZIO. WHAT?!
>
> TASSI. Nobody liked to tell you, Ratzo. It was your mission in life to hate him. So, we all kept the bad news from you.

ORAZIO. Who killed him?

TASSI. Oh well—now, that's another awkward—ah—

ORAZIO. You killed him, didn't you!

TASSI. Well—yeah—I got mad. He was cheating at cards again and I hate it when—

ORAZIO. YOU KILLED CARAVAGGIO?! THE MAN WAS A GENIUS AND YOU KILLED HIM!!

TASSI. You never liked him, Ratzo. Anyway, you have Bella.

ORAZIO. YOU WOULD HAVE KILLED HER, TOO!! YOU'RE A MONSTER!!

ORAZIO punches TASSI in the face and knocks him out. He takes a long swig of wine and passes out, collapsing in a heap. (154-56)

Again, Clark's narrativization accomplishes a comedic effect, this time through hyperbole. By having Tassi admit to killing one of the greatest painters of their age because of a card game, Clark does not merely present Tassi as "sinister," as Benedetti concludes; rather, she blows the misogynist's actions so far out of proportion as to render him a serial criminal who murders as well as rapes. In adopting a style of exaggeration, Clark's message seems to be that in life we should fight our persecutors not on their own terms—those of malice and mental and physical assault, as Orazio does when he punches Tasso in this scene—but in terms that satirize their misdeeds. By adopting a stance that privileges (sanctioned) humour over violence, Clark rejects the outright elimination of an oppressive voice (which would only serve to instate another oppressive voice) in favour of an open-ended, inconclusive outcome.

Both the double meaning in the Interrogator's words and the hyperbole in Tasso's actions are examples of issues raised by Bakhtin's work on the dialogic in carnival laughter. The Interrogator is the absolute essence of the high power, in this case judicial, being brutally mocked in a "carnival" court. From the Interrogator's own mouth we hear both the official voice and the unofficial voice. Similarly, Tasso's exaggerated evil parodies, in a broader sense, the horrible deeds of misogynist males throughout history. This parody is accomplished within a polyvocal dramatic form that is, in Clark's hands, an arena for examining the perpetuation of State power in a stratified society.

Concerning the validity of so-called "historical fact," Ric Knowles has states,

> At best, contemporary history writing recognizes that every "received" historical fact has been shaped and reshaped from conflicting imaginations, mental projections, and mappings that bear particular cultural, ideological, and political inscriptions. (*Theatre* 122)[29]

By writing an historical "revision" in *Life*, Clark does no less than create another fiction, a parallel fiction, in her arrangement of the fabula—the facts and fictions in her play— with the goal of telling Artemisia's story in an original way.

Thus, by foregrounding her own narrativization *via* irony in *Life Without Instruction*, Clark questions the very grounds on which narrative is constructed. With a self-awareness in her writing, Clark revisions the fabula of a "real life"

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[29] Or to put it another way, Bal writes, "for people conversant with the practice of law, the notion that narrative is a construction, rather than a reconstruction, must seem pretty obvious, if not 'natural.' Let them talk to historians. Who's to say that narrative serves the truth?" (220).

personality in a way that suggests that all fabula are not only open to interpretation, but will necessarily be rearranged by anyone who represents a history—that is, a narrativization—of past events.

The four plays discussed in this chapter problematize narrativization as a human symptom. Lyle, Major Sweeny, Turner, Val, Sondra/Sam, Cyril, the daughter, George and the Old Woman are but a few of Clark's narrativizating storytellers; and Clark is herself a narrativizing storyteller. Through the juxtaposition of these narrativizations we see that our compulsion to impose meaning by narrativizing the events of our lives is not merely a result of our alienation in an unsympathetic world, but is, in fact, a catalyst that further alienates us. Armstrong' review is more a symptom of the very narrativizations all of us make in our everyday lives than a capturing of the "Truth." Clark's dialogue offers explicit examples of narrative inscription, narrative misrepresentations, labelings, *anti*-narrativizations, multiple interpretations, polyvocal discourses, "confabulations," historiographic metafictions and parallel fictions, each of which are integral for constructing dramatic action in her plays. An examination of Clark's dramaturgy foregrounds the very framework of narrativization itself.

Indeed, it is in the blurring of moral judgment that Clark's dramaturgy is able to closely comment on our fragmented, narrativized society. Writes Hutcheon, following Hayden White,

> even to narrativize the events of the past is already to moralize and to impose closure on a story which did not end and whose constructed end suggests that there is a moral meaning inherent in

> those events (rather than in the narrative structuring of the historian). (192-93; *see also* White 18, 24, 27)

In other words, not only are an ending and a moral precursors to the telling of a history, but their inclusion is unavoidable—the history is necessarily tainted by morality in the process of the speaker's telling of it. This may remain subtextual, as in modern writings, or may be made explicit, as in many postmodern writings.

In Clark's dramaturgy, her open endings evade moral synthesis because they do not to satisfactorily resolve the major dramatic question posed in her plays. In *Wasps*, for example, Val does not experience a closure that directly follows the play's fabula. Instead, she discovers that legally she was never married to Cyril in the first place (because Cyril was already married to Sondra). But by this time, so many narratives of Cyril's life have been presented that we cannot trust any of them. Marge Turnbull's last words—"God's in His Heaven. All's right with the world" (123)—are misleading because they are futile aspirations for narrative closure. Moreover, the final scene of the play throws the construction of the play's moral, as well as its narrative, into question: if we are to believe that Val has learned her lesson about becoming involved with a man whose past she does not know, the "renewal" of her relationship with the enigmatic Andrew Blett makes us wonder if there *are* any lessons to be learned from the narratives we construct in our lives. By denying a resolution to her heroines' objectives *via* the Clark twist, Clark's endings cast doubt on the very structures of her plays. Toward what moral are the events are leading? Clark's plays develop a remarkable stance toward the very act, process and reason for our compulsion to tell stories, not by saying "I am questioning" but by playing

out this stance in the choice and placement of her fabula and in the very dialogue of her characters. By undermining our expectations of narrative closure, *Wasps* may more accurately reflect the often unexpected arrangement of "fabula" in "real life."

*Inter*textually and *intra*textually, *Wasps* presents a community whose history is untraceable because no narrativization is privileged enough to become a metanarrative upon which a History may be written. No deep "realities" are possible without privileged narratives. Instead, signified-free and packaged narrative fragments—small collections of fabula—are piled one on top of another like building blocks to create a network of signifiers that are nothing like the referents (original events) they signify. Like information/entertainment briefs such as newsbites, "commercials" and music videos, these forms of narrative are reducible to moveable sign-systems that reemerge, distorted in the dialogue of various characters, thus distorting the play's narrative continuity.

In this sense the community of *Wasps* is, like Baudrillard's Disneyland (171-72), its own "hyperreality," and therefore closer to our "reality" than "realist" drama, which does not admit its own narrativizations. *Wasps* in particular seems to ask, "If we cannot know our past experiences, how can we claim to know our present?" The notion of alienation is wrested from its Marxist definition and redefined as the result of the Subject denying that "reality" has been replaced with a reconstructed set of illusions, even believing that State power is part of the "real." In postmodernity, the State exerts its power by driving its collected illusions—Baudrillard's "simulacra"—to serve its ideologies as if they were components of the illusionary/illusive State machine. There is an inherent nihilism to *Wasps* that is not explored to the same extent in Clark's other plays, but is surely approached in all of them.

In relativist terms, if we create and comprehend all narratives based on our understanding of other narratives in the same way that we comprehend all words in relation to their meanings with other words, on what ground can any narrative, adrift in a sea of discourses, be based? Following Lyotard, Hutcheon writes that "the referents of narrative are represented as referring inevitably to other narratives (or discourses), and not to any brute reality" (150-51). Clark's plays expose the difficulty of producing narrative and relying upon narrative for an understanding of our past and our present. In so doing, Clark throws into question our construction of "reality"—there can be only stories about stories, never stories about facts. At best, stories present their facts and admit their biases, but in the end no moment in time, fictional or "real," can be brought into the present with any fidelity. Postmodern drama such as Clark's offers its audiences a questioning of this very phenomenon. Inevitably, we must remember that there is an overarching threat involved in the tracing of any narrativization in our culture: by entering into any discourse—the tradition of narrativization included—yet another narrativization is produced, complete with all the trappings of "morals" and "outcomes."

CHAPTER THREE
"WHY ARE YOU IN MY ROOM?"
PERVERSIONS OF SPACE AND TIME IN CLARK'S PLAYS

In Chapter One, Ric Knowles' tripartite grouping for Canadian drama was introduced, the first category being modernist plays founded on spatial aesthetics. His discussion is concerned with how environmental plays in Canada have perverted traditional modernist structures *via* their "politicization of space and democratization of focus" (*Theatre* 164). But among Sally Clark's *oeuvre*, plays other than the co-authored environmental theatre piece *Sleeproom* have ingrained in their text a deep concern for the politicization of space. The first part of this chapter argues that space functions as a narrative and ideological structuring device in *The Trial of Judith K.* The relationships between settings, characters and items that carry the alienating and oppressive traits of the subject-State, and the antisubject-heroine who struggles against them, are considered here. The chapter then considers how the subject-State defers responsibility infinitely such that Judith Kaye can never confront her oppressor and therefore never be free from oppression.

In Clark's dramaturgy, space inherits the alienating qualities of the antagonist subject-State and then imbues its inventory of items with these alienating qualities. Both the space and the items come to stand in for, or become extensions of, the State itself. The "antagonist" side of the protagonist/antagonist binary is fragmented such that even the space between the individual/State (antisubject/subject) combatants—symbolically the "/" in this equation—is subsumed by the latter's agenda before, finally, the former is

subsumed as well.[30] In this way, Clark's dark comedic plays focus on the price of individuality in a modern state, the struggle of a single heroine within hostile male territory and the ideological line between private and public space.

Judith K. begins by following Judith Kaye from her unexplained arrest in her bedroom by two gas station attendants and a pushy Police Inspector to her court date before an Examining Magistrate who pardons a homicidal psychopath but refuses to tell Judith for what crime she has been arrested. From there, Judith meets increasingly stranger people who offer her questionable advice on her case. These include Mrs. Block (Judith's landlady), who herself remains inexplicably under arrest; Deedee (Judith's sister-in-law; Judith is separated from her husband) who suggests Judith see Theadora; Theadora Moxie (a former prostitute turned lawyer) and Fred Pollock (a lascivious painter), both of whom have offices attached to the courtroom; and Ted, a homicidal psychopath with whom Judith becomes sexually involved, just as Theadora and Mrs. Block have before her. Not even a Nun's parable in the final scene can provide Judith with answers to her case and in the end she dies at the hands of the two gas station attendants while Ted looks on.

Judith Kaye's male-dominated world is in a cruel state of affairs and it is her responsibility to find a solution without assistance. The characters in Judith Kaye's world are unsupportive because they have reconciled themselves to a state of indefinite arrest. In this purgatory-like state, their surrender oppresses Judith. The gas station attendants (Biff and Clem), the Police Inspector, the Magistrate and Pollock thwart her in Law; her client (Mr. Brazier) joins with her female coworker (Mrs. Voight) and secretary (Miss Lang) to prevent success at

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[30] My labeling of the State as the "subject" and the individual as the "antisubject" foregrounds Clark's heroines as heroic combatants, however unwilling, struggling against the pervasive domination of the State.

work; and Mrs. Block, a man dressed in Mrs. Block's clothes (Milly Pearce) and Ted frustrate Judith at home. Ted in particular promises concrete assistance, telling Judith, "I have influence with the Examining Magistrate. I could help you" (48); but in the end, Ted is condescending toward Judith: "I'm ashamed of you, Judith K. You're no different from the rest of them. You just wanted to live" (119).

From her bedroom to her workplace, the courtroom to Theadora's Law Office, Pollock's studio and finally to the Cathedral, Judith Kaye's environment and the objects within it are imbued with the oppressive forces of a system that appears to be predetermined and omnipresent. Judith cannot free herself from these forces because they are everywhere and in *all* things—"a space totally saturated with alienation" (Murray 79). All worlds (both present and verbally invoked) and all stage matter—such as properties (Judith's newspaper, Brazier's stack of papers, the money handed to Ted the Psychopath, Theadora's knife), costumes (Judith's flannel nightie and black business suit) and sets (the unexplained door in the Bank corridor behind which the Flogger flogs Biff and Clem, and all of the rooms that are part of the Court of Inquiry)—have overt ideological significance, all serving to alienate the heroine.

As delineated in *Theatre as Sign System*, Aston and Savona's four levels of operation of the "stage picture" (146)—functionalistic, sociometric, atmospheric and symbolic—combine in Clark's dramaturgy to oppress Judith Kaye. The "*long sharp knife*" (71) used by Theadora to pick her nails (functionalistic) reflects Theadora's casual position of power over Judith Kaye (sociometric) while creating a tense, potentially violent atmosphere (atmospheric). As a symbol of the Phallus, the employment of the knife underscores Theadora as displacing male power with female power in the setting of the "Law Offices," referred to as

"Theadora's Law Salon" in the stage directions (symbolic). If the Law *in absentia* is to be held responsible for Judith's plight, Theadora's knife and her employment of it absorbs the Laws antagonistic qualities. The play's plot follows that of a journey of discovery wherein Judith struggles to "break free" from a State-sponsored system of oppression, but she is thwarted at every turn. There is no safe haven to which she may run, no eutopia[31] in which she may place her salvation. Ultimately, Judith searches in vain for a release from her dystopic environs wherein resides, as Deleuze and Guattari have warned in *Anti-Oedipus*, "the lax permissiveness of the capitalist world, where passing the blame promotes the abusive treatment of others in the form of exploitation, robbery, racism, lasciviousness, and, of course, routine and often murderous violence" (269). Each of these abuses (with the exception of racism) is prevalent throughout Clark's *oeuvre*, and nowhere more so than with Judith's murder at the end of *Judith K.*

Such threatening stage matter in *Judith K.* represents the resonance of dramatic tension between mimetic and diegetic—onstage and offstage—spaces.[32] Michael Issacharoff has argued that "dramatic tension is often contingent on the antinomy between visible space represented and invisible space described" (211), while Shimon Levy has stated that "in theatre [...] a

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[31] Here I preserve the original Greek spelling of "eutopia," meaning "good place," as opposed to "utopia," meaning "no place" (see Robert M. Adams' note on Thomas More's usage in *Utopia*; More 3).

[32] This study uses Issacharoff's definition of mimetic space as "that which is made visible to an audience and represented on stage" and of diegetic space as that which is "*described*, that is, referred to by the characters" (215, *italics in original*). This use of "diegetic" should not be confused with diegetic *sound* in film: "sound whose source is visible on the screen or whose source is implied to be present by the action of the film" (see "Diegetic Sound").

In both senses, then, "diegetic" may refer to the entire fictional world presented, but when opposed to "mimetic," as it is in our discussion, it refers specifically to non-mimetic—that is, non-represented —narrativized space within this world. The emphasis here is placed on the presence/absence of visual elements of representation in a theatrical performance, as opposed to audio elements.

genuine struggle exists between imaginary and real spaces" (64). Ideology[33] is always already embedded in the symbolic resonances of mimetic and diegetic spaces presented in a dramatic text. This spatial approach to ideological transference is a phenomenological one, drawing from the Gestalt school of psychology which

> demonstrated how different spaces or types of space were invested with different values for having been screened through the individual human observer's value system. Along with [Gaston] Bachelard and others, they showed that space is never neutral but is integrated into human life, has a "topological structure" (to use Kurt Lewin's term), and changes when the human viewpoint changes. (Murray 78)

Alienation is a "*totalizing* condition" in space (78, *emphasis in original*). In an overwhelming collaboration, all mimetic and all diegetic spaces are imbued with an oppression that unceasingly defers responsibility elsewhere, infinitely, to a transcendental signified.

Space indicated for performance is a mimetic space because it is at once thrown into a metonymic relationship with the world to which it refers, and invested with heightened significance. Moreover, the matter within that space—including stage props, costumes and sets—takes on a heightened significance with reference to that space. All diegetic space is also invested with a heightened significance by virtue of the fact that its very selection for inclusion in the play's

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[33] I take Marx's definition of "ideology," *via* Althusser, as my starting point; that is to say, "ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man [*sic*] or a social group" (Althusser 149).

dialogue (or *via* its properties, as with the postcards in *Moo*) implies necessity. In terms of performativity, however, action occurring in mimetic space tends to hold more weight than action occurring in diegetic space because the former generally follows the main action of the play while the latter follows backstory, supportive or foreshadowing material.

We can therefore say that in the sign systems of the stage, specified spaces and the stage matter within these spaces are signifiers for ideologically imbued signifieds and referents. This connection with "reality" makes all stage space political as, for Murray, all space in Franz Kafka's novels has political and alienating repercussions:

> [S]pace itself is often made to stand for that agent consigning the alienated [anti]subject to its alienated state: the factory, the slum where it lives, the forlorn world in which it moves about. The [anti]subject senses the source of its oppression but is almost never able to confront it in, say, a single figure or a seat of power that would be answerable. Hence, and in a very real way, space itself must carry the burden. And since alienation is a profoundly ideological matter, space too becomes ideologically charged. [Such] works draw us into alienation as into an environment[—]a space totally saturated with alienation. (78-9)

Clark foregrounds the importance of mimetic space with frequent indications in the dialogue (signifiers). The play opens in Judith's bedroom, the most private of places, where two gas station attendants, Biff and Clem, are already reading her morning newspaper and eating her breakfast while Judith

sleeps in bed. After Judith wakes with a scream, two of her first three questions to her intruders refer to mimetic space: "Who are you? What are you doing *here*? Why are you *in my room*?" (12, *italics mine, passim*).[34] The space which Judith considers to be personal has been invaded. The attendants' response, "We're *here* to arrest you" (12), further indicates mimetic space. Moments later, when Judith discovers Biff is wearing her flannel nightie, she yells, "Oh my God! Get out of *here*! Get out of *my room*! [...] Who let you in *here*? Did my landlady let you in?" (12). Ownership of the play's mimetic space has immediately been thrown into question and a power hierarchy has been established within it, with Judith at the mercy of the gas station attendants.[35] This ownership is further reinforced later in the scene when the stage directions read, "*Lights up on a swivel chair at the back of the room. A man is revealed, sitting in the chair. He is inspecting*" (17). Judith's own bedroom is not a place of sanctuary; it is a place infiltrated by State oppression. With Judith Kaye as the antisubject and the State as the subject, the latter alienates her even from within her private realm.

Moreover, because we see Biff and Clem inside Judith's private world before Judith is aware of them, and because they are presented as comfortably living within it, it is as if they had never engaged in the act of entering her space at all—as if the States' ideological presence in her space has always already existed. The act of entering is defered into absence, penetration is presumed and we must conclude that her space was never *her* space at all. Worse still, Judith relinquishes any status she may still hold by withdrawing from mimetic space so that the three intruders can hide and surprise her a second time (because it is her birthday). Her temporary absence during this game reinforces Judith's low

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[34] Italics in playscript quotes are my own unless they indicate stage directions, or unless otherwise noted (uppercase is used for emphasis in the Playwrights Canada Press edition).
[35] It is worth noting Clark's stereotyping: Judith is at the mercy of gas station attendants, getting the "brush off" as she might if she had taken her car in for repair.

status. Their greeting to her when she reenters—"SURPRISE! YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!" (18)—further demeans her. The stage directions that follow—*"Balloons fall from ceiling. INSPECTOR snaps fingers, leaves with BIFF and CLEM"*—undeniably confirm that Judith's personal space is not, nor has ever been, her own.

To free herself from her unexplained arrest, Judith turns to documents of her identity—her driver's license, birth certificate and passport—but these are immediately confiscated by Biff and Clem as Property of the State. Thus, sustenance, shelter, clothing and now her identity (symbolically) have all been seized. Indeed, we are reminded of her lost identity later in a dialogue with the Examining Magistrate:

> MAGISTRATE. You are Judith K. the house painter?
>
> JUDITH. I am Judith Kaye but I'm not a house painter.
>
> MAGISTRATE. You do not paint houses?
>
> JUDITH. No. I don't! I'm the Corporate Loans Officer for the Bank of Commerce. You have obviously arrested the wrong person!
>
> MAGISTRATE. Have you ever thought about painting houses?
>
> JUDITH. No! Of course not!
>
> MAGISTRATE. You might find you have a natural vocation for it. It would be much easier if you painted houses. Then the files would coincide. (35)

Murray calls this phenomenon "totalization," "a vision of the world where everything everywhere is charged with the same depressing meaning" (58).

Judith quickly realizes that her personal effects are not personal to her at all: they are objects and symbols of the State.

Indeed, Judith's indefinite state of arrest will be a pervasive confinement held for the totality of her life: "You are under arrest, certainly," says the Inspector, "but that need not hinder you from leading your ordinary and tediously boring life" (19). Judith's pervasive confinement is a metaphor for the extended moment of the antisubject's alienation. Moreover, his statement makes it clear that Judith has been under surveillance for quite some time. In the alienating realm of the play, this means since birth. The fact that the play begins on her birthday foregrounds this. As a prisoner in her own life, Judith is the individual in society described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* as "the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200). Judith is always the observed object of her oppressors, never the observing subject. She will always already be an automaton of the State in any space she traverses.

Thus, the signifiers in the play's dialogue are important not only to sustain dramatic tension within the confines of the play's action, but also for highlighting Judith's situation *before the play began*. In other words, the *inciting incident* of the play is blurred. Judith's conflict began, necessarily, when she was born into her alienating society. Judith's life is, necessarily, already under State oppression because, as István Mészáros points out, in a society that alienates its subordinates, "those who stand 'outside alienated society' or 'outside alienation' stand nowhere" (181). Judith Kaye is necessarily already alienated and already oppressed. But like a tumor no longer benign, the play's opening puts an end to the equilibrium of Judith's "ordinary and tediously boring life" by forcing her out of passive compliance with her milieu's bureaucracy. If it were not for her arrest, the naïve antisubject would not fight for alternatives or escapes.

However, as the play's ending reveals, Mészáros is correct: escape from an alienating society is impossible. Judith Kaye must die trying.

Also in the opening scene, the influence of diegetic stage space is introduced as an active factor in her struggle. Occupying her mind with possible ways out of the situation, Judith first calls for her *landlady* who is elsewhere in the house; she then exclaims she is late for *work* and must hurry away; finally, she announces she will call the *Police* (11-12). Clark therefore brings mimetic and diegetic space into opposition at the play's outset: the former is already Judith's oppressor and the latter her hope for salvation. However, Judith quickly learns that diegetic space holds the ideologies of her oppressor as well. Upon entering, Mrs. Block reveals that she let in Biff and Clem in the first place; then the Police Inspector, already in Judith's bedroom "*inspecting*" (17), is revealed.

Because the oppression occurs in her most personal space, it seems to Judith that her alienation comes from within. She perceives her situation as her fault and that she must work to rectify it. This is the State's victimizing effect wherein the antisubject perceives that blame and responsibility lie with her. Judith considers her plan of action in a soliloquy:

> It is up to you, Judith, to straighten things out. You are going to get organized. You show up Sunday.[...] Make the long trek out to Surrey.[...] Assume they've made a mistake.[...] After all, it's not their fault they're stupid. Most people are stupid. They don't organize their lives. You are going to be prepared. RIGHT! YEAH OKAY RIGHT! GET ORGANIZED! (31)

However, Judith cannot succeed because she necessarily conducts her resistance on the State's terms and within its ideological prescriptions, according to Althusser's formulation: "[Y]ou and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" (161-62, *italics in original*). Thus, by the end of the play, Judith is reconciled to her fate:

> It would be more heroic to accept my fate. Yes. Keep a clear mind. (*laughing softly*) Get *organized*. I always wanted to grab at the world and get as much as I could. And what was the point. What have I *accomplished*? I've been too busy grabbing to pay any attention to what was in my hands. Too busy moving to know where I was going.[...] One must proceed with grace. (118, *italics mine*)

"Organization" and "accomplishment" for Judith are tools for success at the outset of the play, but by the end it is clear that they are the State's own tools for alienation. Judith ultimately realizes they have failed her, though she does not see that they were merely attractive traps set by the State for the purpose of occupying the proletariat with activities useful to the State's own proliferation. The antisubject in an alienating bureaucracy will never succeed at pinpointing its goals through organization and accomplishment because of the confusing fragmentation of its surroundings, according to Murray:

> Views of the surrounding world frequently lack any organizing set of values and the views themselves come across as skewed or

> fragmented [and] suffused with various complex emotions [...] that serve as further impediments to ideological understanding. (58-9)

The State maintains power by promising order in bureaucracy, but delivers discontinuous paths to wish fulfillment. Judith finally resigns herself to "fate," the State's third tool, forcing her into utter despair. Organization, accomplishment and fate are all parts of a necessary façade offering false hope to the antisubject.

When Judith is "*alone on stage*" in act 2 scene 4 it is the only moment in the play in which she may be on a setless, propless stage, free from ideologically imbued characters and stage matter. Here, Judith occupies a *counterspace* to the play's oppressive settings. It is a rare, extended moment in which Judith has the freedom to express her mind.[36] But it is also a portrait of the antisubject in a landscape with few State-imbued sign systems, save for the business suit she wears. In this counterspace, Judith is furthest from, but never outside of, the oppressive mechanisms of her world. It is a space of utter solitude. As Murray has noted, "Such settings, on the critical level, reflect negatively on the dominant space in the works" (47). Mimetic space has already been established as threatening to the antisubject. The scene presents a landscape of loneliness that is Judith's sanctuary from the oppression that necessarily separates every antisubject from its environment. However, this "total" solitude is fleeting and

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[36] There are, in fact, eight other moments in the play in which Judith speaks alone on stage (at the ends of I.i, I.vii, I.ix, II.iii, II.iv and II.vi; II.ix in discussion with Voight's Voice offstage in diegetic space; and at the outset of II.x). However, these are not as drawn out and they occur in Judith's office or in the Cathedral: specified settings teeming with mimetic-space State ideology.

in the next scene Judith is once again set adrift in ideologically abundant stage space.[37]

The space of Judith's office is problematized when Judith learns of similar ideological obstacles linked to her mimetic location. Biff, Clem and the Executioner are discovered by Judith in the Bank's storeroom, apparently in the midst of a torture session. Here we see that even the location in which Judith should possess the most public power as a Corporate Loans Officer has already been infiltrated in the same way that her personal bedroom space had been (how long have they been there?). Indeed, Judith's reaction, "What are you doing here?" (38), is the same as the question she asked of Biff and Clem in her bedroom earlier, once again indicating Judith's growing awareness of spatial corruption. Neither her personal nor her professional space is predictable or identifiable.[38]

Spatial oppression at Judith's workplace is evident at a number of other moments as well: Mrs. Voight informs her she can no longer smoke in her own "private office" because of the new "no-smoking *law*" which Mrs. Voight fought to implement; Judith receives a phone call from the "Voice" (oppression without a face), reminding her of her court appearance; Judith calls for her secretary, Miss Lang, to answer the ringing phone in the Bank's diegetic space, but inexplicably

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[37] Contrarily, in the Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) Studio Theatre production in 1999 of *The Trial of Judith K.* (directed and designed by the author), the set from the previous scene with Milly Pearce remained upstage of Judith, primarily for the sake of eliminating a set change. During her monologue, Judith interacted with a dead lightbulb and a ladder with which Milly had been occupied, thus ensuring that Judith was in fact never isolated from oppressive sign systems during the play (Whittaker). The point is an important one because it draws attention to the significance of design decisions in Clark's *writerly* script. With few design notes in her stage directions, Clark allows the designer great freedom in making decisions that will have a wide-ranging ideological impact on the play's message. These decisions hold ideological significance because of the paramount importance here of stage space, as I am arguing.

[38] In the WLU Studio Theatre production this scene was done in S&M style and introduced with Mark's Morrison's rap song "Let's Get Down" under red lighting. The intention was to foreground Judith's sexual frustration, as evident in her "affair" with Ted.

she does not; and, as if to reaffirm the image of Judith under constant surveillance, Mrs. Voight *"lingers by the door so that she can hear the conversation"* when Judith answers the phone (23-4). Judith Kaye cannot rely on those who are close to her in either mimetic space or diegetic space.

Most space in the play—such as the Bedroom, the Bank and the Home—is merely denoted by its function, but the Court of Inquiry—and the locations within the same building, including Theadora's office, Pollock's art studio and the Cathedral (!)—stands out as the play's only mimetic location given an exact address. The Inspector tells Judith that the Court of Inquiry is located at "1284597 One hundred and sixty-seventh street" (20) in Surrey and Judith repeats the humorously cumbersome address; in the next scene, the Voice on the telephone repeats the address again. Throughout the first five scenes of *Judith K.* the Court of Inquiry is referred to diegetically. Its space comes to represent Judith's greatest hope "to straighten things out" (31). Her assumption of the right to a fair trial and the precision of the address further strengthens this hope. But when the dramaturgy of the play thrusts the Court of Inquiry into mimetic space, and with the addition of *"rhubarb," "muttering," "applause"* and *"cheering"* (34-5) heard in diegetic sound cues, Judith is immediately at the mercy of the State's legal system and the totality of its hostile environment.

The Psychopath's "confession" to the Examining Magistrate further adds to the oppressive qualities of the play's space when he lists the exact locations of his victims (the latest of which now lies dead on stage in mimetic space): "One in the Cedar vale woods—left entrance—a couple of feet from the main path. One in the back alley of 152nd Street. Five buried in the basement of the AOπ sorority house. Three in the—" (36, *dashes in original*). And to ensure we

understand the Courtroom to be a hostile space for Judith, her final exchange with the Examining Magistrate reads:

> MAGISTRATE. I merely wanted to point out that today—you may not yet have become aware of the fact—today, you have flung away with your own hand, all the advantages which an interrogation invariably confers on an accused man.
>
> JUDITH. EAT SHIT.
>
> *JUDITH exits, slamming the door.* (37)

Thus, by the end of the first Courtroom scene it is clear that Judith cannot count on the Court for a fair trial. When the Courtroom is thrust into mimetic space it is at once revealed to be hostile and alienating. The Law, here signified by the Courtroom, is confirmed to be an Ideological State Apparatus, in Althusser's terms.

The seemingly boundariless space of the Court of Inquiry complex is yet another agitational device in Judith's dystopic world. Not only does the person responsible for her oppression elude her, but so does his/her location. In a Court of Law one expects to find Justice and its Purveyors, but the Court of Inquiry is something of an amorphous mass with indiscernible boundaries. Why, for example, is Theadora, the prostitute-turned-lawyer, living in a room connected to the Court of Inquiry? When Deedee leads Judith to Theadora's office, Judith is confused:

> DEEDEE. Whazzamatter, kiddo, you look like you seen a ghost?
>
> JUDITH. This is the Court of Inquiry.

DEEDEE. Of course, Trix likes to be where the action is. (59)

And why is the painter Fred Pollock living in yet another room in the Court? Again, Judith is confused, this time as she flees his studio:

> JUDITH. Thanks. Love your work. Goodbye. (*climbing up on bed, quickly opening door, and about to rush out, gasping*) These are the Law Court offices!
>
> POLLOCK. You can stay here if you like.
>
> *JUDITH runs out.* (91)

The way out is literally by way of the sleazy Pollock's bed. In both instances, transitions from mimetic space to diegetic space are unpredictable for Judith (and for the audience), producing feelings of paranoia and absolute fear in, of all places, the seat of public security: the Courthouse. They are feelings that exist throughout Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and to which Clark adds a Stoppardian attention to stage-space games in her play.

Judith K. presents a game played out between the antisubject-heroine and the subject-State on the grounds of mimetic and diegetic stage space. Judith's expectations for freedom from arrest—always present and even encouraged by Ted and Deedee—are disappointed at every step. Her arrest seems increasingly permanent, as made clear by the situation of the self-professed "old hand" (102), Mrs. Block. Says Theadora,

> I spoke to the Judge and he said: "Don't even speak to me about Block"! I said, "True, Edna Block is an old bag of dirt and a podgy

> little nerd but she tries hard. She's been trying hard for six years." Well—then the Judge said: "What do you think Edna Block would do if she found out her case hasn't even started yet? (110)

Like Judith Kaye, Block is an antisubject in a state of perpetual subservience, but never aware of the details. Full knowledge would mean full power and in a bureaucracy no one person, including the Magistrate, may hold either because the flow of information is indeterminantly controlled. Speaking of judges in general, Theadora tells Judith Kaye, "mostly they're as confused as everyone else and desperate for information on the case" (73).

But just as no one person may hold all knowledge or power, no one person may hold all of the responsibility because responsibility is constantly differed up to a higher authority. Throughlines of hope are blocked for Judith from scene to scene. Herein lies the (illusive) source of Judith's oppression. These throughlines may be mapped out diachronically through spatial references and the alternation of focus from mimetic to diegetic space. Biff and Clem are under orders from the Inspector and all three have infiltrated Judith's personal space, yet the Inspector has "no standing in this affair" (19) and differs the possibility of positive action to the Court. At the Court of Inquiry the Examining Magistrate differs responsibility to his files (35), and later he appears to be under the sexual control of Theadora Moxy: "She and I go back a long way" says the Magistrate (63). For Theadora's part, her space is like a harem with the Magistrate and Ted hovering about in obeisance toward her. In fact, power would seem to rest with Theadora more than any other character, if it were not for the fact that she is ill—"I'd love to chat with you but I'm dying" (61)—and therefore neither a promising ally nor a definitive adversary. Here, illness is

equated with moral corruption; so too is Theadora's personal space because she is a former prostitute. Indeed, spatial ideology is conveyed in Theadora's room through a dual function: located in the Court of Inquiry, it is both her bedroom—she *"is lying in bed"* (60)—and her office, with a sign out front reading *"Theadora Moxie-Lady of Law"* (59). The State's legal spaces are indisputably corrupt. It is, in fact, arguable that Ted the Psychopath holds the most power, at least over Judith, but he has no fixed position within the State system, and therefore responsibility can never be traced back to him.

Thus, there is no possibility of reaching the frontiers of alienation because the location of responsibility is repeatedly differed up, through an "intrinsically complex hierarchy" (74; Theadora's phrase) to a space that is never mimetic for Judith because it is never locatable. In Derrida's words,

> Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom.
>
> (22, *italics in original*)

Judith's desires for a eutopian freedom are thwarted because there can never be an unassailable "kingdom" of hope for her, or for anyone, to find. Her objective of freedom cannot be achieved in a world that repeatedly differs the location and defers the time (Derrida's demarcations) wherein freedom is attained.

Furthermore, when Judith asks the Inspector to "tell whoever arranged this joke NOT TO EVER DO IT AGAIN!" (18) we know that the "whoever" is an untouchable transcendental signified whose identity is permanently differed.

The character of Theadora is only one step in a series of responsibility differences in the world of *Judith K.* By replacing the Law's traditional male representation with a female representative—that is, making the masculine absent where it is traditionally present—Clark expands the notion of a faceless, untouchable antagonist by eliminating our capacity to define its identity along the lines of gender. If, as Judith Butler says in *Gender Trouble*, "'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (16), then when this gender intelligibility is problematized as it is when Judith Kaye's antagonist seems to be an illusion, an identification anxiety results. Even though the realization of gender-neutrality would constitute a "logical impossibility" (17) in Butler's terms, it is in the (illusive) State's interest to maintain a gender-ambiguous façade to problematize its location. For if the gender of the subject could be defined, the grounds of its relationship to the antisubject might be defined as well, a plausible first step for the antisubject gaining its freedom. But even gender classification would not solve the identity problem. As Butler points out, "gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time" (16). As long as the identity of the antagonist-subject, gender and all, remains indeterminate, its location will remain indeterminate as well. The grounds of identity differal through space are the grounds upon which the dramatic conflict in *Judith K.* resides, between Judith on the one hand and every object and every space on the other. The removal of Judith Kaye's identity is an early step toward being subsumed into this state of indeterminacy. And, as personified by Milly Pierce in *Judith K.* and Ratzo and Bagoas in *Life Without Instruction* and *The Widow Judith*, the blurred gender identity of an antagonist-

signifier is one important cog in the alienation machine represented in Clark's plays.

In the dialectic produced by the conflict between the mimetic and diegetic space of Clark's play, a number of important conclusions are apparent. *The Trial of Judith K.* exposes space as a medium of oppressive ideology. When the play begins, in *medias res*, Judith Kaye's personal space has been both literally and figuratively appropriated by the State. As an extension of this appropriation, even Judith's most personal effects—her clothing, food and newspaper (her knowledge medium)—are infused with State oppression. The result is a sense that she is monitored by the State at all times—a sense that is strengthened by the other characters' knowledge of the details of Judith's arrest. Moreover, symbols of individual identity—Judith's driver's license, birth certificate and passport—betray her by reinforcing her subservience to the State. Diegetic space, on which Judith is forced to place her hopes for salvation, proves to be increasingly hostile. The result is an inescapable alienation that Judith feels from within, ultimately blaming herself in her perceived defeat. Unreachable boundaries, both physical (the Court of Inquiry) and in knowledge games, augment Judith's sense of lost control. Responsibility for her plight is wholly untouchable, differed instead to the "State." As Judith is hurled down a frustrating chain of indeterminate signification wherein she cannot find the subject-State's location, it becomes increasingly apparent that she stares in vain at a vanishing point leading to nothing more than a gender-ambiguous transcendental signified. It is as if Judith Kaye lives where the enemy already rules, as if her struggle for freedom is years too late. She lives a slave to her oppressors, among other slaves who have not only reconciled themselves to their own oppression but in doing so become oppressors of each other.

Clark's most recent play is a close adaptation of *The Book of Judith* of the Apocrypha (see Appendix I). Her unpublished script *The Widow Judith* has received no critical attention to date, yet it is significant in that it borrows from and then perverts both the spatial and the temporal structuring elements of its source-text, *The Book of Judith*. *Widow* places greater significance on the influence of the story's female and eunuch characters than does *Judith*, thus realigning the gender-identity of the spaces of Bethulia and of Holofernes' camp. At the same time, the play questions the implications of the heroine's deeds, both publicly and privately, by doubling the narrative climax and by way of the Clark twist.

Of Clark's "Judith plays," it most closely follows the fabula of its source.

> It was sort of funny because I thought, well, I've got all these outtakes that I didn't use in *Life Without Instruction*—I'll try and write a play about that. But the weird thing was that I couldn't use any of those scenes because I realized later that *Life Without Instruction* was a fourteen-year-old girl's fantasy of the Bible story, which was totally different than trying to write the Bible story. So then I thought, well, I'll write the Bible story. (Clark "Personal")

The Widow Judith had its only production to date in February, 1998 at the University of Toronto's Glen Morris Theatre, directed by University of Victoria Drama Chair, Brian Richmond. Clark describes the experience:

> I was happy with the production. It was a workshop production. And Brian Richmond, he did a really good job and we had this wonderful time. Like, it's one of those weird things. Sometimes

> you have a horrible time rehearsing and then you get fabulous reviews. Or you have a wonderful time rehearsing and everybody in the cast *loves* each other and we *loved* the director and we *loved* each other and we had parties, and then we got clobbered.
>
> (Clark, "Personal")

Widow's production met with generally negative reviews in the *Toronto Star* ("Widow" E12) and *Variety* (Friedlander, "Widow" 69), both of which compared the play's humour to television sitcoms and generally concluded that the play was uneven and unfinished. For these reasons and others—Clark says "there's something missing in it" (Clark, "Personal")—she has relegated the script to her desk drawer for future consideration. However, in its current state *Widow* offers valuable dramaturgical insight into time- and space- structuring in Clark's *oeuvre*.

Because *Widow* so closely follows the fabula of its source, it would be redundant to relate the play's plot; nevertheless, a few of Clark's more significant deviations should be noted, including character, narrative and thematic adjustments. First, Clark has combined "the men" of Bethulia into two men: Jacob, who is wheeled around in a cart by the women of Bethulia following one of his (unexplained) "spells" (8)[39]; and Uriah, a "nice" (11) though lonely man who was not paired off in the small town earlier in life because everyone has paired off already (as Judith points out elsewhere, "It's like Noah's ark around here"; 10). Second, in addition to Judith and her maid, here named Abra, three women—Naomi, Susannah and Ruth—appear in Bethulia as stereotypical gossips, where no other women are mentioned in the Apocryphal story. Third, the Voice to whom Judith speaks in the story is personified as the voice of her

[39] Page numbers are from Clark's unpublished, undated manuscript *The Widow Judith*, kindly provided to the author for this study in August, 2002.

dead father, who is also Yahweh or "'God' to you" (24), in Clark's representation; in the original there is no such claim that God speaks through Judith's father. Fourth, in the Assyrian camp, in addition to including a couple of Holofernes' soldiers, Clark adds three Harem women—Sabrina, Serena and Delilah—each of whom has apparently been Holofernes' favourite woman at some point during the past five years.[40] Holofernes and his eunuch servant remain, and unlike the latter's representation as "Ratzo" in *Life*, Bagoas retains his name from the original. Achior, the leader of the Ammonites who tries to warn Holofernes that the influence of the Israelite's god should not be taken lightly, also remains from the original story.

Widow shifts its source's narrativization from the *individual accomplishments* of the heroine to a more critical questioning of the *public consequences* of Judith's actions. While Clark preserves the primary characters of the story—Judith and her servant, Holofernes and his servant, and the dissident Achior—she also gives voice to the vocal yet inept men of Bethulia and the obedient but equally ineffectual soldiers of Holofernes' camp. But it is in Clark's invention of the three so-called "Good Women of Bethulia" (8) and the three "Bad Women of Assyria" (4) that we see a shift in the story's ideological thrust.

The Apocryphal story is concerned with the individual heroism of Judith and measures her success by the riches and fame bestowed upon her after she saves the Israelites from invasion: "[S]he was famous all over the land and in her time. Many men desired her.[...] She became greater and greater.[...] No one could terrify the Israelites in Judith's days, nor for a long time after she died" (16:21-3). Not surprisingly, Judith's heroism and the extent of the consequence

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[40] In the University of Toronto production, the "Bad Women of Assyria" were played by the same actors as the three who played "The Good Women of Bethulia," including Clark herself in the roles of Naomi and Delilah.

of her actions are left unquestioned in the Apocryphal story. Judith's ability to save her town may be underestimated before she leaves, because she is a woman, but inevitably, neither the virtue of her actions nor their far-ranging consequences are ever thrown into doubt. Having faced annihilation, the Israelites have recorded their story in a one-sided account, as a complete triumph.

But Clark's narrativization (re)presents the story in a different, problematized, light. By juxtaposing the two "camps" of women—the fickle gossips of Bethulia and the aggressive whores of the Assyrian army—Clark is able to enter into discourse with the social consequences of Judith's actions for both the Assyrian army and the Israelites. For Holofernes' "harem" of three "Bad Women" ("we can't have the usual complement," says Bagoas; 58), the prospect of retreat would mean a loss of the value of their only position in society; but conquering the Israelites would mean that more women would compete for Holofernes' attention (6). The three "Bad Women" know that they will find themselves moving farther from Holofernes' attention and therefore farther from their commodified value in the social stratification of the Assyrian camp, whether the Assyrians are victorious or not. Their only label, that of "harem," will inevitably lose reference if either the camp's stratification is disrupted in defeat, or if more women are gained in victory.

Negative social implications of one sort or another are expected results of Judith's actions in the Assyrian camp, but Clark problematizes the outcome for the people of Bethulia as well. The consequences of Bethulia losing to the Assyrians are considered in the original story, but in Clark's story they are discussed by the townsfolk in more specific, graphic detail, including razing the town, raping the women and beheading the men (13). The consequences of an

Israelite victory over the Assyrians are also problematic, according to Clark's play, from the point of view of Judith.

As in *The Trial of Judith K.*, Clark's dramaturgy in *The Widow Judith* places specific and far-reaching significance on the identity of space as an active force. For example, as in the original story, Judith's place of prayer in the valley is private: "You mustn't come here!" (55) she says to Holofernes when he finds her there. But beyond this example, instead of preserving from the source the distinction between female-private and male-public space, Clark destabilizes the dialectic so that the public space of both Bethulia and Holofernes' camp are imbued with female identity, while male space is private and personal.

Information about Bethulia's milieu, current status, moral and religious values and its political decisions is revealed mainly by Clark's three "Good Women" in open, public space in five scenes (I.iv, viii, ix, xi; II.xv). It is through their dialogue that we learn there are few men left for Judith (or anyone) to marry in the town. In fact, the men are generally belittled by the women as being either kind but potentially poor lovers, or good lovers but having few other redeeming qualities: "Men!" exclaims Susannah while the town is under siege, "They're so stupid!" (27). Uriah, for example, is passed over by the women as a suitable husband, his only apparent fault being that he is nothing more than "nice." It is also through the interaction between the "Good Women" and Judith that we see she is despised by the town because she is publicly outspoken against the decisions of the men, at one point going so far as to "*tip JACOB out of the cart*" (34) in an argument.

Conversely, the accepted way to exert one's influence over the men in Bethulia seems to be to do so in private, a frequent occurrence according to the cart-bound Jacob: "The entire town is filled with women telling me what to do!"

(30). The example set by Naomi's influence over Jacob has ultimate political resonance in that it becomes Bethulia's official response to the Assyrian threat: "I told Jacob to surrender the town [...] if He [God] doesn't come through in 5 days..." (27). The paradox, of course, is that even though the women belittle the men, they are ferociously protective of the men's right to make decisions for the town; in fact, when Judith disagrees with Jacob about his five-day deadline for God, they publicly stone her until she resolves to go to the Assyrian camp herself. Judith's very departure from Bethulia may be of her own accord, but it is hastened by Naomi:

> JUDITH. (*to URIAH*) Open the gates, please, Uriah.
>
> URIAH. You're not going to leave, Judith? Really, Naomi didn't mean—
>
> NAOMI. I meant every word. Going to have a nice little picnic in celebration of the siege?
>
> JUDITH. (*to URIAH*) Open the gates, please.
>
> NAOMI. Do as she says. (*moves toward gates to open them*)
>
> URIAH. But—
>
> *NAOMI opens the gates. JUDITH and ABRA pass through.*
>
> NAOMI. Traitor!
>
> *The gates shut behind JUDITH and ABRA.* (34)

Here, Naomi's impetus for throwing Judith out of Bethulia follows the earlier confrontation between Judith and Jacob in which Judith tipped Jacob out of his cart. Her rejection of Judith is her revenge on behalf of her husband. Thus, the

town's (ineffectual) male identity is reaffirmed through Naomi's positioning alongside one of its leaders, her husband.

But the women of Bethulia, like the elders in the original story, are fickle, which destablizes the gender identity of *Widow*'s spaces. Throughout their five scenes we see the women considering husbands for the unwilling Judith, stoning Judith out of the city, and finally heralding her as their saviour by bestowing gifts and public praise upon her. Naomi in particular, the most outspoken of the three "Good Women," vacillates more than anyone. When Jacob enters to the women in a panic about the pending Assyrian assault, Naomi says, "We're always at war with someone, dear. It doesn't mean anything" (12); but when she realizes who their leader is, she panics as well: "Holofernes! (*gasps*) You told me what he did to the Medes" (13). And later, when the women try to blame the men for not guarding the wells, Naomi defends their error in her despair: "Then we're all stupid and we're all going to die" (27); but, as the women are panicking about the siege, Naomi shows new-found optimism in an effort to calm them down: "Look, I'm sorry about that story I told you. It was just one incident" (27). It is, in fact, Naomi's voice who leads the other women so that she becomes the official voice of the "Good Women" and, by extension, of the town of Bethulia itself.

Thus, Clark's "Good Women" define Bethulia's public space both along and against the lines of female stereotyping. Sometimes the women are hysterical, especially when conflict draws closer and the men have given up hope; but at other times they are either assertive or affirming toward their ineffectual husbands and at times seem to rule the town through their husbands. The female identity of Bethulia is therefore doubled because it goes both with and against the milieu's social expectations. Thus, Judith finds Bethulia's female-

public space to be hostile, just as Judith Kaye finds all of the public spaces she encountered to be hostile. Judith's female peers in the town are sources of oppression when they might otherwise be a source of support.

In this way, *Widow* is able to represent the original, male-dominated story by reaffirming its female stereotypes while, simultaneously, delving deeper by foregrounding the impotence of the male elders. By problematizing the identity of Bethulia's public space in this way, the play suggests that the "Good Women's" random hysteria, more than the men's impotence, may be to blame for the town's initial weakness and possible surrender. Politically speaking, the women seem to be in a position to run the town if only they would take more direct control, perhaps along the lines of Judith's fabled transgression.

The significance of Holofernes' male-public space, present in the original to a lesser extent, gains greater significance in *Widow*. Placed in mimetic space, Holofernes' "war council" is foregrounded as male-public space. With Bagoas, "Holofernes' men" and Achior present, Holofernes begins by addressing the room with "Men, we have a problem" (15). Unlike *Widow*'s Bethulia, where male space is entirely absent, Holofernes commands his space through the tactic of expelling Achior and making an example of his insubordination. Then, alone with Bagoas, Holofernes reveals his war plan to lay indirect siege to Bethulia by cutting off its water supply. Holofernes' leadership, while tested by Achior, is completely sound in male-public space.

However, the ultimate gender identity of the most private of Holofernes' spaces, his private tent, is less straightforward than the identity of the play's other spaces. This ambiguity not only reflects the play's primary power struggle between Judith and Holofernes, but also its secondary power struggle between Holofernes and Bagoas. Holofernes himself gives voice to the power

relationship between him and his eunuch servant when he speaks with Judith in the tent:

> Bagoas says I'm a hopeless degenerate but the fact is, he hates to see me sober. It scares the living shit out of him. He might lose his control. He's such a fucking control freak. I'm his creature he cranks up and takes out for special occasions. Win this war. Fine. Destroy that village. Okay. Then he packs me away again, so I can rest. (79)

By admitting his own servant's control over him, Holofernes problematizes the all-important power dynamic at the head of the warrior nation of Assyria. Furthermore, when Holofernes continues by saying to Judith, "He hates you. You know that, don't you," Holofernes gives voice to the relationship between Bagoas and Judith, the third side of the power triangle. Always protective of Holofernes in his tent, Bagoas initially tries to keep Judith's arrival from Holofernes until the General finds out about it himself and confronts Bagoas. Then, as Judith visits Holofernes nightly at Holofernes' command, Bagoas is reluctant to leave because he does not trust her.

Thus, the problematized gender identity of the tent's space reflects the power struggle between Judith and Holofernes, inside and outside of its walls. Like the town of Bethulia at the hands of the Assyrians, Holofernes' tent must survive constant siege from the outside forces of the prying Bagoas and the covert Judith. The penetration and subsequent power struggle here is played out in terms of sexual politics between the male General, his gender "neutral"

servant and the female Judith. In this way, the tent's space becomes a microcosm for the conflict dynamics of the play.

A number of conclusions may be drawn regarding space in *The Widow Judith*. First, by destabilizing the male-public / female-private dialectic of its source, Clark's play challenges established ideologies regarding gender and power relations inherent to the narrativization of *The Book of Judith*. By claiming that not only is Judith oppressed by the male-public space of the advancing Assyrian army, but also by the female-public spaces of Bethulia's "Good Women" *and* of its men, Clark first moves the Judith story away from a narrative of one people against another, then moves the story away from a narrative about female *versus* male space, leaving us with a narrative that questions all forms of power, including that of the heroine herself. In a Derridian sense, then, Clark deconstructs the binaries at the root of the Judith narrative so that neither male nor female, public nor private is privileged. In their place is a heroine-story that simultaneously views all genders, populations and spaces as potentially accommodating but eventually oppressive. As in *The Trial of Judith K.*, Clark's heroine in *Widow* represents an everyperson struggling against a battalion of objectives and narrativizations to achieve freedom from those who are unable or unwilling to view their oppression as a function of a system of ideologically imbued spatial controls.

Widow's spatial dynamics are organized chronologically, but their representation perverts traditional temporal dramatic structuring. As he does for space-structured modernist plays, Ric Knowles traces the influence of time-structured naturalist plays on the development of contemporary Canadian drama. Knowles argues that as Canadian theatre retold its histories during the late sixties and early seventies, it began to shed its naturalist roots in favour of

collective or collaborative creations. This transition reflects a more general trend away from proclaiming a single "Truth" and toward foregrounding one's narrativizations. In *Widow*, temporal perversion is accomplished by playing with the source's anticipated climax, and then with its moral-espousing denouement.

Widow begins with the beheading climax, but the scene represents a dream, or rather a premonition, of the deed Judith will later commit. The dialogue between Judith and Abra at the end of the scene confirms that this dream has been reoccurring for Judith, with a significance that is not yet realized. From there, the play progresses in a linear fashion.

However, *Widow*'s perversion of temporal, linear dramatic structuring occurs *vis-à-vis* its perverse dual-climax structure. The play's first climax is the predictable, necessary moment in which Judith beheads Holofernes (II.x); but its second, more thematically relevant climax occurs when Bagoas discovers his master's headless corpse four scenes later (II.xiv). This is the moment in which the balance of power between the play's two forces, Judea and Assyria, actually turns. This perversion reverses cause-effect plotting, first, because it is realized not by the action of the play's hero(ine), but by a socially lower character who is not only a secondary character in the play, but is defined, paradoxically, by an absence of gender identity in that "he" is a eunuch.[41] Second, by blurring the (structural) location of the story's climax, *Widow* challenges the focus of the source's narrativization by postulating that while it is Judith's "great" deed that slays the embodiment of her people's oppressor, it is the symbol that she slays which holds greater resonance in their path to victory. It is the discovery of the dead leader by Bagoas, more than the killing of Holofernes the man by Judith, that sparks the Assyrian retreat and situates Judith as her people's heroine. The

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[41] Cf. Gilles de Rais in Clark's *Jehanne of the Witches* is similarly positioned outside of the gender stratum.

glorification of Judith logically follows her actions, but her deed functions as a precursor to Bagoas' discovery in Clark's retelling.

Second, as in all of her plays, Clark's ending serves not as a conclusion to her play, but as yet another complication. In this case, *Widow* ends not with the heroine's death, as is common in Clark's other plays, but with a monologue by Judith at the age of 105. It is quoted here in its entirety:

> I was hoping he'd haunt me but he never did. Of course, the story changed as the years rolled on. And at the sickening age of 105, I'm the only person left to tell it. With people like Naomi safely dead and buried, I can tell it any way I like. My virtue has increased with each passing day. An intelligent, devout and chaste widow who singlehandedly slew the evil tyrant. Who is more culpable? The person who tells the lie? Or the person who believes it? My beloved told me a whopper and I chose to believe him. I've been living with my sin for seventy-five years. But we'll be together soon. (*looks up, opens her arms in an embrace*) Set me as a seal upon thine heart for love is strong as death. I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. (90)

Here, we see an example of the Clark twist operating on four dramaturgical levels. First, at the level of genre coding, although the play proceeds as a comedy it undermines its own (ironic) celebratory pre-ending. In the second-last scene, when Judith waves to an adoring public, she engages in a celebration that befits comedy's "all's well" outcome; but by acknowledging the negative side of her actions in the final scene, she taints this celebration. Because Holofernes

never "haunted" Judith, her private longings were never fulfilled. The play is therefore as much a hero(ine)-tragedy, in the Aristotelian sense, as it is a comedy.

Third, at the level of narrative, by claiming that "the story changed as the years rolled on," Judith foregrounds the importance of narrativization for the construction of the story of her life by others, including Naomi and the other gossip-mongering "Good Women" of Bethulia. Within this monologue, in fact, Judith engages in her own narrativized reconstruction of her life when she boasts of being virtuous, intelligent, devout, chaste and, indeed, a hero—but all of these are unsatisfactory for her. Her narrativization, more than the others', holds prominence for us not only because she is the story's heroine, but also because her advanced years position her in a place of critical separation from past events. She has earned authority, and therefore authorship, over her fabula, her past.

Finally, at the level of character development, the heroine's conclusion—"we'll be together soon"—is at once both presumptuous and problematic. Is reuniting with (the spirit of) the man who did not appear to her in seventy-five years the best Judith can hope for? The masochism inherent in Judith's desire to be with Holofernes is again reminiscent of the relationship between Moo and Harry, Val and Cyril, Hannah and Turner and Judith Kaye and Ted. As with all of these women, Judith searches for completion through a bond with a mentally abusive man; as with each of these plays, *Widow* is a dark comedy whose characters question their own realities and the stories and backstories therein.

CONCLUSION

Sally Clark's plays are best reorganized into the hybrid genres of historiographic metadrama, environmental theatre and dramaturgy of the perverse, sometimes even sharing among these classifications. Falling primarily under the third category, her plays *intra*textually generate dramatic conflict by opposing narratives, in a polyvocal sense, while her adaptation plays *inter*textually fictionalize "fact." Most of Clark's plays construct their narrativizations along the lines of space and/or time perversion.

As with *The Trial of Judith K.*, some of Clark's plays primarily pervert space: *Lost Souls and Missing Persons* presents an erasure of Hannah/Zombie's identity in private space (where she delivers her monologues); and *Sleeproom* breaks apart traditional stage/audience space as an experiment in environmental theatre. Other of her plays primarily pervert temporal structures of their source material: *Life Without Instruction* juxtaposes the distant timeframes of *The Book of Judith*, the fictionalized life of Artemisia Gentileschi and Clark's modernization of both to create a complex child-fantasy-heroine structure; "Ten Ways to Abuse an Old Woman" has a narrative drawl in the tempo of its episodic structure; and *Moo* distorts categories attached to the main character's age with flashbacks and flashforwards in Moo's life. And, as with *The Widow Judith*, Clark's *Jehanne of the Witches* perverts both spatial and temporal structures by collapsing timeframes and spatial references by revealing its play-within-a-play structure only at the end of the first act. Perhaps only *Wasps* and *Saint Frances of Hollywood* fall outside specifically spatial or temporal perversion: the former perverts dialogue-driven dramatic action, while the latter primarily perverts genre classification.

The significance of studying narrative in any social discipline is summed up by Mark Ledbetter: "As Bakhtin suggests, to be human is to enter into conversation with myriad narratives from which we gain an understanding of ourselves and of the world in which we live" (ix). Within the English-Canada dramatic environment and without fail, Clark's wide generic breadth has allowed for the exploration of strategies of perversion that have the potential to revise the ways in which stories are told and heard. The inhabitants of Clark's dramatic worlds are relentless and unforgiving. They bear without fail a tragicomical "every one for themselves" mantra, a result of their failed attempts at constructing satisfying narratives. These impotent narrativizations, as if jettisoned from their very narrativists, align against each other generating dramatic conflict. This hostile alignment explores, but never synthesizes, so that the audience's desire for dramatic catharsis is thwarted. In place of a cathartic device is an implication of the audience's role in objectifying the characters. The desire for a contiguous moral is replaced by a contemplation of the very act and possibility of morality construction. Worlds without morals are indeed inhabited by the relentless and unforgiving.

Worse still, the worlds' very spaces and the objects within these spaces are invested with narrativity (and therefore ideology) inherited from the subject-state, with its unrelenting agenda of total alienation. But from space to space the attempts by the antisubject-individual to locate her aggressor are always already in vain as responsibility is ceaselessly differed away, abetted by other (masochistic) antisubject-individuals. Counteraction is not only fruitless but serves only to further alienate the antisubject in a feedback loop of perpetual subjugation. Lacking recourse from without, the antisubject turns within, internalizing her struggle. She draws from her own creativity to appropriate

past-narratives for the purpose of self-instruction. As childhood coping mechanisms, these fantasies progressively influence her life such that by the time they have withered away, the antisubject is left as empty and alienated as she has always been, but without recourse to her familiar illusions.

This study has covered seven of Clark's ten plays in detail. In a theoretical sense, first, this study has formulated a theory of dramaturgical narrativization useful for the analysis of postmodern drama; it is a theory that focuses most specifically on the generation of dramatic conflict and is useful at both the *intra-* and *inter*textual levels. Second, this study has drawn from Issacharoff, Derrida and Foucault, among others, to suggest a theoretical framework for considering dramatic conflict as a product of ideologically imbued and invariably differing stage spaces. These apparatuses put forward the traditional notion of conflict as being central to dramatic action, but suggest how this conflict may be analyzed in polyvocal dramatic works. The work of these theoretical apparatuses amounts to a study of how we may pervert ingrained modernist approaches to drama.

Set to première at Nakai Theatre this season (March 26-30, 2003), Clark says her current play, *WANTED*, will abandon her dark comic aesthetic. On the topic of writing her first tragedy, Clark says of *WANTED*, "I got tired of writing comedies that people don't direct properly and so I finally thought, all right, I'll write something that's not funny" ("Personal"). Her scripts have always had dark elements and for the influential reviewers mentioned in this study, the comedy of her plays has often been undermined by the tragedy. After two decades as a professional playwright, by adopting a dialogic stance with her (anxious) milieu, Clark's choice to write a tragedy is evidence of her willingness to adapt—that is, to rewrite her narrative—within her cultural environment.

It now remains to pose the question that has perhaps been put off for too long: What is gained by perverting neo-Aristotelian drama? To begin answering this question, let us compare historiographies. First, from the *New York Times* drama critic Walter Kerr, writing in 1955:

> No dramatic form, good or bad, has enduring vitality. The great Greek theatre [...] wore out its inspiration in less than eighty years. The Elizabethan theatre [...] spent its energies in less than fifty-five. The best-known period of French drama [...] lasted forty-two.[...] Dramatic activity operates in lively short-term cycles.[...]
>
> [Henrik Ibsen's] *Pillars of Society* is two things: a literal milieu study, and a liberal moral document. The fusion of those two points of technique—a photographic surface, a socially significant content—became the pattern for the drama of the first half of the twentieth century. (9, 10, 12);

and then from Ric Knowles, writing in 1999:

> Aristotle, Oedipus, and the Bible have a great deal to answer for. In Canada, their combined influence [...] has shaped the dramaturgical unconscious of most playwrights, directors, theatre critics, and theatre audiences of the generation that witnessed the rebirth of Canadian drama in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is the same generation that produced and celebrated plays such as David French's *Leaving Home* and *Of the Fields, Lately*, Michael Cook's *Jacob's Wake*, and a host of other works in the tradition of

> poetic naturalism that continues unabated, if no longer unchallenged, even today. (*Theatre* 25)

Kerr's words are a warning that has gone unheeded, if we are to believe Knowles' reaffirmation of the same state of affairs at the end of the last century. Written forty-four years apart, their sentiments are ominous and identical signposts on a circular road along which the Western Dramatic Canon has traveled long, but for no great distance. Naturalism has reigned as the dominant dramatic form since 1877; for the life of a dramatic genre, an unprecedented time-span of 125 years! Sally Clark's work has surely found success in the shadow of a monolith.

APPENDIX I

SUMMARY OF *THE BOOK OF JUDITH*

The Book of Judith is one of the Apocryphal books, likely written between 300 and 100 B.C.E. At first, these books were withheld from public consumption for the benefit of a privileged few. In certain circles, at least among the Jews of the second century A.D., the Apocryphal books were "held in higher esteem than the canonical books" (Oesterley 4). As with many of the Apocryphal books, *Judith* has been included and excluded variously from the Old Testament over the centuries. In most cases, these books have been, at one time or another, understood to have informative, if not divine, merit. *Judith* in particular was likely written by a Pharisee during the Maccabæan period, around 150 B.C.E. Though its phrasing suggests that it was originally written in Hebrew, only the Greek translation survives. It has been further suggested that the song which ends *Judith* was in fact written first and that the story itself was set down later as memories began to fade. The background information which begins *Judith*, with all its inaccuracies, would therefore have been the final addition.[42]

The Book of Judith is considered to be among the best-written books in all of the Scriptures.[43] It tells of a wealthy Hebrew widow named Judith who saves the Israelites from the advancing armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Assyria, ruling in Ninevah.[44] Led by General Holofernes, Nebuchadnezzar's army has

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[42] For more on situating the origin and authorship of *The Book of Judith*, see Oesterley (25, 111, 179-81) and Dancy (68, 70-1).

[43] See Oesterley and Goodspeed, among others.

[44] Nebuchadnezzar was actually ruler of Babylon. In fact, Oesterley points out that the Assyrian Empire had "ceased to exist before he came to the throne" and Nineveh had already been destroyed in 612 B.C.E (178). As well, the Israelites' fictitious city of Bethulia is mentioned nowhere else but in *Judith*. Dancy suggests that it is a sort of "any place" faithful to God because the word (Bethel) means "house of God" in Hebrew (83).

The "extraordinary historical blunders which figure so prominently" (Oesterley 178) in *Judith* have led scholars to believe that the Judith account is merely fiction, though proper

conquered "like locusts" (2:20)[45] all of the lands between Assyria and Israel and now, nearly 200,000 strong, has blocked the Israelites' water supply. After thirty-four days, the Israelite magistrates decree that if God does not save His people within the next five days they will surrender to Holofernes' army. Upon hearing the magistrates' decree, Judith announces to the Israelites that to save them she "will do something that will go down to the sons of our nation for endless generations" (8:32). Following a passionate prayer—"Oh God, my God, listen to a widow like me" (9:5)—Judith and her maid descend into the nearby valley in which Holofernes' army is camped. "When the men heard her words and observed her face, they regarded it as wonderfully beautiful" and lead the two women to Holofernes' tent (10:14-17). Judith then deceives Holofernes by convincing him to allow her to pray alone in the valley every morning so that she can tell him when God has informed her that the Israelites have sinned against Him. The sin, Judith says, will occur when the Israelites begin to drink their holy wine and eat cattle, results of their water supply drying up.[46] Holofernes is enchanted by her beauty and allows her to pray, anticipating her report of God's pending anger, the sign that his armies can attack when it is safest, at the moment the Israelites' God no longer protects them. On the fourth evening of her encampment with the Assyrian army and following a banquet for Holofernes' slaves, Judith remains alone with Holofernes in his tent while he is

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names and places mentioned in *Judith* tend to be real, if incongruous (see Hadas xviii as well as Goodspeed 131, Oesterley 177-80 and Enslin and Zeitlin, *passim*). For a running account of *Judith*'s historical inaccuracies, see Dancy 72-127 and comments therein, including at one point the rather facetious comment, "the author again tries to give us some historical background, and again succeeds only in confusing us" (Dancy 82). *Judith*'s author was clearly prone to narrativization.

[45] Direct references from *The Book of Judith* are from Goodspeed's translation.

[46] Dancy notes "the mention of *cattle* presumably refers to the prohibition on eating the fat and the blood (Lev. 3:17)" (110, *italics in original*).

"prostrate upon his bed, for he was drenched with wine" (13:2). Then, taking his sword,

> she struck him on the neck twice, with all her might, and severed his head from his body. Then she rolled his body off the bed, and pulled the canopy down from the pillars, and after a little while she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, and she put it in her bag of food, and they both went out together as they were accustomed to do, to offer their prayer. They passed through the camp and skirted that valley, and went up the mountain to Bethulia and came to its gates. (13:8-10, *tense preserved*)

When Holofernes' army discovers that their leader has been slain they panic and flee, pursued by the Israelites and all of the forces that had fallen to them since they left Assyria. They are decimated as they retreat. Judith is hailed as "the exaltation of Jerusalem [...] the great glory of Israel [...] the great boast of our nation" (15:9) and when the Israelites "plundered the camp for thirty days," Judith is given all of Holofernes' riches (15:11).

Space and landscape hold ideological importance for power and gender discourse in *The Book of Judith*. From the vast geography of the Near East over which Nebuchadnezzar rules and the Median capital of Ecbatana over which he first triumphs, to the lands between Ninevah and Bethulia over which Holofernes' army is victorious, to the focus on the fictitious city of Bethulia itself and Judith's home, and back out to the surrounding valley in which Holofernes' 200,000 soldiers have encamped, *Judith* takes the reader through spaces of diverse dimensions and ideologies.

Judith presents an environment in which the Israelites' small, sacred city of Bethulia is at the centre. Virtually all of the land, from Nebuchadnezzar's "great city of Nineveh" (1:1) to Bethulia, is quickly conquered by Holofernes. It is clear that Holofernes' army razes and pillages a great breadth of cities on its journey westward to the Mediterranean coast, sacking Damascus and intimidating to surrender the cities of Sidon and Tyre before reaching the valley near Bethulia (in fact, 50,000 soldiers have apparently defected to the Assyrian army by the time Holofernes camps in Bethulia's surrounding valley). Bethulia is regarded, at least in the eyes of Judith and her contemporaries, as the Israelites' last defense: "For if we are taken," Judith says, "all Judea will be taken, and our sanctuary will be plundered, and [God] will hold our blood responsible for the profanation of it" (8:21). For protection, the Israelites use the geography of the region for defense: "they had prepared for war, and had closed the passes of the mountains and fortified every mountain top and put barricades in the level country" (5:1). This strategy for territorial, that is *spatial*, defense is so effective that Holofernes must resort to cutting off Bethulia's water supply if he is to achieve victory. Even after a month he dare not advance until Bethulia surrenders. The vast surrounding hostile environment within which the *Judith* story plays out reinforces a common theme of Judeo literature—that of the chosen people's struggle for survival against evil's overwhelming odds.

Within Bethulia is the home of Judith where she has lived alone as a widow since the death of her husband three years before. Little description of her household is given except that her husband has left livestock and slaves for her. As well, she has "built herself a tent on the top of her house" (8:5), a shelter for private meditation, common among pious Jews. Her reputation is an excellent one in the public sphere because her devotion to the memory of her

husband is well known. Judith's private space in her rooftop tent is a sacred space, a place of safety and reflection in which her communion with divinity is known throughout Bethulia; Judith prays alone here before setting out for the valley with her maid to meet Holofernes. The male leaders of the town speak to their people freely, but Judith's place is to speak to the leaders privately before her words may be set into action. Whereas public space is very much the masculine domain of war and politics, in *Judith* private space is where Judith and her maid hold influence over the destiny of Judea.

The Assyrian encampment in the valley is the antitheses to Bethulia, and Holofernes' tent therein is the counterpart to Judith's rooftop-tent. This space, which is the sanctuary for Holofernes himself, becomes the private site of Judith's heroic deed. Just as she had prayed privately in her home by calling on God to "direct your anger upon their heads [and] put in the hand of a widow like me the strength to do what I have planned" (9:9), Judith prays alone in the valley, accompanied only by her maid. And similarly, having sent her maid out of Holofernes' tent, Judith calls to God to "Look favourably at this hour upon the works of my hands for the exaltation of Jerusalem" (13:4) before beheading the general. As it was in her home, Judith's power is bolstered through private communion with God in a private space. And it is only upon Judith's return to Bethulia that she is celebrated publicly for the divine deeds she performed in private space.

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